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The life of Penitence
Lent Confession *W. J. Carter*
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THE LIFE OF PENITENCE.

S. MacKlem

*Toronto. July 17
1891*

A SERIES OF LECTURES

DELIVERED

AT ALL SAINTS', MARGARET STREET,

In Lent, 1866.

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BY THE

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NOTICE.

THE subject of outward self-mortification is not attempted to be treated of in these Lectures, and this will appear to be an omission in what professes to be, at least practically, a general view of the main principles of a life of penitence. The omission, however, has not arisen from undervaluing the importance of self-mortification, as a penitential exercise, and an aid in striving against sin. It may even seem, in one passage, that it has been spoken of disparagingly. But this arises merely from its being there alluded to in contrast with godly sorrow, in special reference to the superior efficacy of this latter quality in the production of one particular grace.

The author felt that, for himself at least, more experience is needed before venturing to speak on such a subject with the authority that necessarily belongs to the preacher. Moreover, such a subject is more suited for private counsel than for public exhortation, needing cautions and adaptations to individual circumstances of health and susceptibility, which must ever render its full treatment, in any detail, matter requiring the wisest discretion.

It is plain that penitence cannot be conceived of

without the accompaniment of some form of self-mortification. As sin is the indulgence of self, so the overcoming sin implies the forcible denial of self. The principle of fasting lies as deeply imbedded in the genius of Christianity, as that of prayer; and the various forms of self-affliction which are disclosed in the lives of the Saints, who thus sought to keep under the body and bring it into subjection, are but the expansion and development of this primary law of our LORD's own enforcing. The countless pains of the Passion, which He bore, so far beyond the necessary pang of His atoning Death, ever live to sanctify all true acts of self-imposed penance, by which the followers of the Crucified seek to draw nearer to Him. But the examples of those who have gone before us with the truest signs of the spirit of mortification, teach us as strongly the need of lowliness and self-distrust, of carefulness and meek submission to authority, lest through presumption or indiscretion the good which is sought be marred or altogether hindered by the way of seeking it.

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LECTURE I.

PENITENCE LIFELONG.

S. LUKE xv. 17—19.

“AND WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF HE SAID, HOW MANY HIRED SERVANTS OF MY FATHER’S HAVE BREAD ENOUGH, AND TO SPARE, AND I PERISH WITH HUNGER! I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER, AND WILL SAY UNTO HIM, FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN, AND BEFORE THEE, AND AM NO MORE WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON: MAKE ME AS ONE OF THY HIRED SERVANTS.”

THE parable of the prodigal son is divisible into three distinct parts. The first part describes the falling away, with its consequences. The spending all, the famine, followed by the hard bondage under the citizen of the “far country,” the feeding the swine, and yet no man giving the sinner even the husks to eat,—these earlier features of the parable represent the whole period before the crisis of the conversion. The next part embraces also a complete period. The coming to himself, the returning desire for his father’s home, the resolve to go back, the thought that fills him by the way, of attaining at least the hired servant’s place,—these events bring us to the very meeting with his father, when the end is gained. The third part, which commences at this point, has a double purpose. It

pourtrays in vivid colours the peace and loving reception of the true penitent even in this life, while the elder brother is introduced in connection with this view of the parable, as a warning against the spirit which would grudge such an oblivion of the past, and such richness of mercy to one who had sinned so grievously in the abuse of such great grace. But allowing for this one feature of the parable to have its possible realisation in this life only, the remainder points to a yet higher fulfilment. Its language can find an adequate meaning only in the completed and unchangeable bliss of the Eternal Home. The terms have an initiatory accomplishment, a foretaste of their ultimate fulness, in the perfect absolution of the penitent on earth. But nothing less than the heavenly greeting can exhaust their inner truth. The coming forth of the everlasting God, the embrace, the kiss, the best robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, the feast, the merry-making,—are the full satiety and assured certainty of eternal beatitude in the embrace of heavenly love. It is a symbolic picture of the entrance into the Presence of God.

The second part, therefore, is the converted life, the entire earthly course, from the first return to God until death. It represents the state of penitence, and describes it as continuing on in an uninterrupted course, even to the end of life. The continual going onwards to the father, and the lowly thought not allowing itself to rise above the prospects of a hired servant, while yet in trustful contentment casting all on the assured hope of mercy,—a self-distrust dissipated only in the startled surprise of the actual meeting with the father,—these circumstances mark the whole interval between the return of the prodigal

to his right mind, and his final irreversible acceptance. The penitence is represented as continuing until heaven is won.

Other parables also, which more or less clearly indicate the hope of repentance, imply that it is a life-long state. This truth is involved in the parable of the lost sheep laid upon the shoulder of the good Shepherd. The sheep clings to the state in which it was first recovered, even until brought home to the fold. It is borne on upon the shoulder, as it was taken up. In the state of penitence in which it was found, it remains to the end. To leave it would have jeopardised its hold upon its deliverer. The same is implied again in the parable of the labourers. Those hired latest were to labour not knowing with any certainty what they should receive. They were to be dependent upon mercy. There was indeed a promise of reward given to all, but no definite agreement except with those who were first hired. The householder agreed with them for a penny a day. But for those who were hired at the third, the sixth, the ninth, the eleventh hour, there was no sum fixed. The first assurance had been forfeited, and the uncertainty must continue up to the last moment. It was only said to them, "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive."¹ They laboured indeed with hope, but with no express assurance. They had forfeited this blessing by their delay. They were therefore to toil on for they knew not what. They had to bear to the end the consequence of having been for so large a portion of the day standing idle. They were thus far in a lower state than those first hired, even up to the

¹ S. Matth. xx. 7.

very crisis of the final settlement. The dependence on pure mercy in their lowly expectancy is shown indeed to have been their safety, a protection against the envy which the other labourers exhibited. Their loss had become their gain. But it was their gain, only because it became their continued state,—a state of penitence which failed not even till the fulness of their unexpected reward, given at last to their utter amazement at the end of the day, when their labour wholly ceased.

The same momentous truth of lifelong penitence is implied in many expressions of Scripture familiar to all. “Happy is the man that feareth always.”¹ “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”² “Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.”³ “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”⁴ “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”⁵ “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”⁶ “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of,”⁷ therefore lasting until the salvation, which is beyond the need of repentance, is secured. All these texts speak one pervading truth. They are grounded on one prevailing idea, and they describe a state of life. One essential feature characterises all the conditions involved. They are very axioms of the faith reduced to practice, cardinal texts through which one momentous verity comes out to view again and again. And they are manifestly component parts of the one idea of Penitence. Fear, trembling, reverence, lowliness, hu-

¹ Prov. xxviii. 14.

² 1 S. Pet. i. 17.

³ Heb. xii. 28.

⁴ Philip. ii. 12.

⁵ 1 S. Pet. v. 6.

⁶ S. Luke xviii. 14.

⁷ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

miliation, sorrow, are more or less the necessary and expressive characteristics of an abiding consciousness of sin. They are the proper expressions, and the true safeguards of a penitent, and they are represented as enduring throughout life.

Further, this same truth appears, if we enter into the causes of penitence. Penitence springs in part from a sense of sin. As the sense of sin grows, so penitence grows; and a sense of sin grows, as a true life grows. It follows from this, that penitence deepens with life. Now it is a striking fact, that we may trace the very same progress of the knowledge of sin in Holy Scripture, which is experienced in our own personal consciousness. Its depths only gradually open to view in the Scriptures; and they only gradually open to us in our own experience.

How remarkable is the simple quiet way in which the first sin is mentioned in the Scripture! The sin of our first parents is recorded as a child's common fault might be spoken of, as a thing creating no surprise. "She took of the tree, and did eat." "She gave also to her husband, and he did eat."¹ Scripture indeed never speaks as with surprise either of Divine or human events. The all-seeing God surveys all things with calm undisturbed equanimity, and accordingly Holy Scripture, which is His mind revealed, speaks a similar language. Still it is striking that the first entrance of sin into man's nature should be chronicled as one of the simplest facts in his history. Then again throughout the Old Testament, it is not so much the inner character of sin as affecting man's nature which is dwelt on, but its outward consequences, the judg-

¹ Gen. iii. 6.

ments it brings, the wrath of God it provokes, the misery and disorder it works in the world, its infectious and spreading power, its perpetual resistance to the will of God,—external results rather than the working of sin in itself. Even the Ten Commandments speak of sin chiefly as it affects social relations. The sins forbidden are viewed under the forms in which their injury to our fellow-creatures is experienced. Even in the Gospels, if we except the Sermon on the Mount, what strikes us most is the daring, the malice, the blindness, the enmity, the alienation from God, the hardness, the selfishness, the hateful contrast to all that is pure and lovely and Divine, and the utter hopelessness,—still only external manifestations of sin. More terrible consequences of sin are revealed in the Gospels, because shown in the very Presence of God, in the Face of JESUS CHRIST, yet still these are but its outward results. Only in the later books of the New Testament, in the writings of the Apostles, the inner working of sin in man's heart is laid bare, the sinful nature displayed, its very roots exposed to view, the inward disorder out of which all those outward manifestations arise, made clear. There we read of the “law in our members warring against the law of our mind;”¹ of “the flesh lusting against the spirit;”² of the “doing what I would not, and not doing what I would;” even of, “what I hate, that I do;”³ of the “not being sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves;”⁴ and the accurate, the scientific analysis of sin into “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”⁵ Only in the New Testament do

¹ Rom. vii. 23.

² Gal. v. 17.

³ Rom. vii. 15.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

⁵ 1 S. John ii. 16.

we at all discern, that lust indulged in the heart is adultery already committed,¹ and that hatred even in thought is actual murder.²

We have thus a progressive series of revelations, beginning with the simple fact of disobedience, followed by the manifold outward dreadful signs of the continued increase and working of sin; only at last the inward seat and enormity of the secret disorder being revealed. The knowledge of the true nature of sin is the final result of the gradual development of the Divine dispensations.

In this very same order sin reveals itself to the sinner's soul. At first it is felt only as a simple fact, as in a child's history, unexplained, unintelligible, with an instinctive sense of shame indeed, but without any consciousness or discernment of its causes, or its real horror. As life grows, the outward consequences of sin are felt—the evils which it produces, as they act on others who are dear to us, or react on oneself. Later still, and then only by little and little, the inward working of sin, its secret springs, its hidden power, the disordered elements of the soul itself, become revealed to the consciousness. As we live on, the advancing inner revelation becomes increasingly clearer, and more appalling. It still grows more deeply, more intensely perceptible as the end approaches; and on the bed of death, before the glazing eye, even though the soul be full of peace in the atoning Blood, though the vision of the very Face of God has become all the brighter and more assuring, yet, even because of that very light, and its intenser brightness, sin at the close of life appears yet more exceeding sinful, even to the Saint. If penitence deepens as the

¹ S. Matth. v. 28.

² 1 S. John iii. 15.

sense of sin becomes more vivid, so with advancing life there will be an ever-advancing penitence.

Shall we venture further into the mystery of life, and attempt to realise the consciousness of the soul in this respect after death? There will be assuredly, to the faithful, rest in the clear vision of the LORD,—the full, unchangeable assurance of peace, the ring, the kiss, the best robe, the feast, the intense rejoicing; but in the fire of that illumination which will cleanse away the remains of sin, blotting out, we may trust, at last the very faintest records of it from the memory,—yet we may surely believe, that as sin will only then in the full blaze of the Face of God appear in its full horror, so penitence will then take its profoundest and tenderest form. Only then will penitence, as only then will sanctity, be complete,—complete when the last absolution from the lips of the Son of Man Himself shall fill the soul with the untold rapture of its final most restful assurance, doing away for ever the possibility of a relapse,—the Voice from the Judgment Throne sealing the accomplished predestination of God.

Consider, moreover, the terms by which Holy Scripture denotes the state of penitence. They imply the same truth. These are chiefly three—conversion, repentance, contrition. Each of these terms may be viewed either as a single act, or as a state; i.e., as a temporary, or an enduring condition of the soul. If viewed as simply expressing separate acts, they are but the springing up to the surface of currents of feeling, ever deepening below. There are rivers which, after showing themselves above ground, bury themselves, and run silently beneath the soil, and

this for long periods of their course, to rise again, and again to be hidden, till they are lost in the central seas from which their waters were drawn. The difference between an act of penitence, and the life of penitence, is of a like kind. The one rises above, the other flows on beneath, the surface. The stream equally runs on, whether seen or unseen, its own predestined course.

All these terms alike imply enduring progress, extending to the end of life; never reaching absolute perfectness on earth, but deepening as life deepens. Conversion is an entire turning of the soul, a turning *together*¹ of the whole constituent elements and powers of the soul, until there is formed an harmonious conformity of the faculties and their several tendencies, now weaned from all evil bias, in unison with the Mind of GOD. Repentance, again, is the very mind itself changed,² its transformation, nay, its very transubstantiation; the passing away of the old mind, the creation in its stead of the new mind. It is the Mind of CHRIST taking the place of the mind of the mere natural man. And so, likewise, contrition represents a work which must ever be imperfect in this life. It is distinct from attrition in this, that the latter means only the temporary bruising of the soul struck by fear, shaken by the judgments of GOD; contrition, the thorough breaking and bruising of the whole sub-

¹ The preposition "con" in composition implies "thorough," "pervading," as though carrying with it all parts related to the subject. Its force is seen likewise in the term, *contrite*. "Verto" is to turn, so as to produce a complete change from the former position.

² *μετάνοια*, the Greek term for repentance, is derived from *νοῦς*, the mind, and *μετά*, implying the change of state. It has no real Latin or English equivalent.

stance of the soul, an interpenetration of it, a making it soft and tender throughout. Both terms are metaphors drawn from the action of force on a stone,—the one a mere external bruising, the other a reduction of its entire substance into powder.¹

While thus it clearly appears that penitence, if viewed as a complete work, embraces nothing less than an entire life, yet it is not one and the same in quality, neither does it always wear one aspect. It has its periods, marked by different phases. To a superficial eye it may seem to have ceased, when it has only changed its form. Penitence in this respect resembles a lifelong sorrow. The paroxysms of a first grief will cease. The desolation of the wilderness, which at first succeeded the garden of Eden, will be clothed again with sweet flowers. There will break in upon the soul new lights, and peace, and sweetness of resignation, and the grasp of a higher fellowship within the Communion of Saints. There will be a shining in of God within the soul, now taught meekly and hopefully to suffer with CHRIST. But the remembrance of what once was, and the feeling of what no longer is, or can be,—this remains fresh and keen, only it has gone down deeper. It has settled into the depths of the soul's consciousness, as an accepted presence, brooding over all life, more penetrating far than the first gush of woe. It has coloured all life, and keeps its sad reign within, even while it has become a welcome guest, and a precious boon of God, through which the life has thankfully become more intimately, more entirely, and more consciously

¹ *At-tero* is literally to rub or break upon the surface; *con-tero* to rub and grind down together the whole body.

united with Himself. The sorrow has laid its calm and permanent spell upon the soul, which once so tremblingly shrank from its approach, and now so willingly, so lovingly accepts its embrace. Yet all the while it has constantly worked itself downwards, and from this very cause all the more surely. Outwardly it has seemed to have passed away, but only because it is veiled within hidden depths from the common eye.

So it is with penitence. The first convulsive state will subside. The gushing of the floods of tears will become less and less frequent. The utter anguish of remorse will be moderated. Those first fervours of zeal, indignation, fear, self-revenge, will assume calmer, gentler, more disciplined forms. That first overwhelmed consciousness of sin, which absorbed into itself all other thoughts, will quiet down, and become more real, more true, more simple, more reasonable. The self-consciousness of that first engrossed state, that one terrible idea which possessed the soul, will be disenchanted; and as the inner life expands and rises, becomes more intelligent, more illuminated, it will more quietly accept the consciousness of its sin, and hope will grow, and the sweetness of the sense of forgiveness penetrate, and the feeling of new powers, purer tastes, higher efforts, will prevail. New worlds will spring up around; and through the vista of the changed scene the Face of God will be restored to view, shining in more and more. Thus a hopeful, bright, and energetic condition of soul will supervene upon that first half-maddened remorse. And as the soul rises higher, and forms of saintliness appear,—a new creation rising out of the chaos, once “without form and void,”—life, more and more given up to God, will assume a steady, pro-

gressive tone of enlarging and diffusing holiness ; it will become Divine in its renewed powers. It may then appear as though penitence had ceased ; to the outward superficial eye its necessity, too, may have seemed to pass away. But it has only gone into deeper depths ; it is hidden, because it has penetrated into all the inner forms of life, and clothed itself with them, and now assumes their shape. It has no longer that demonstrative being it once had, simply because it has assimilated itself with all the inner life, and intermingled itself with all its actings ; it has become the sweetness, the softening influence, the savour, the penetrating tenderness of all faculties and all energies. The secret working of penitence has settled in, to become the precious consciousness of forgiving love, the inner bond of union with CHRIST, the dearest plea of its renewed adoption, its constant safeguard, its root of power, its strength of development and advance. The penitent is being numbered among the Saints. The advancing soul rises into surer, truer, more enduring saintliness ; and this the more, because it ever remembers what it once was, and why it has become what it now is. And the perpetual penitential act is really all the more profound and living, because it is calmer, and more secret ; it has more of understanding and of assurance, less of impulse and of self-reproach ; more of faith and of the Spirit, less of flesh and blood.

There is a tradition in the Church, that S. Peter, even to his last days, whenever he heard the crowing of the cock, wept afresh. It was the continued silent lingering swell of the storm which broke through his heart, when on that dark night he went out and “ wept bitterly.” His Epistles are remarkably calm ; none of

the bitterness of the Penitent's woe appears. But no Apostolic Epistles contain so many, and so touching appeals for humility and reverential fear.¹ Nothing again in all the records of the Apostolic writings is more heartstirring than S. Paul's remembrance of his youthful sins, which he utters in one of his latest Epistles, when he reckoned full thirty years of a life almost unexampled in faith and endurance. How strikingly fresh and tender is the tone of penitence which pervades them. One instance will suffice; "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first JESUS CHRIST might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."²

True penitence, therefore, is a life-long thing; a perennial flow of godly sorrow, not the gushing of a fountain once opened to be quickly closed; an abiding state, not a passing paroxysm; a clothing which the Saint lays not aside until it be exchanged for the robe made white in the Blood of the Lamb. And even then we know not how much of the hue and colour that melts into the perfect light, is composed of the sadness of penitence, even as the rainbow above and about the Throne is drawn upwards from the tears of earth to be suffused with the Divine Glory.

The call to penitence, therefore, needs to be made, not merely to one just awakened to a sense of sin, but

¹ See especially I. i. 13, 17, 24; ii. 11—25; iii. 14—17; iv. 1, 7, 12—19; v. 5—10.

² 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. The date of the Epistle is ordinarily stated to be A.D. 65; his conversion, 35.

to those also who, being in different stages or at various levels of the spiritual life, are advancing progressively onwards. It is a rule sometimes given in Confession, if but lesser faults form its subject matter, that some former sin should, if such there were, be recalled and revived in memory, in order that the absolving grace may fall upon the soul thus freshened in its consciousness of sin, and stirred to a more vivid act of contrition. This advice which may at times be discreetly urged, is borrowed from an universal law of true Christian life,—that past sin should live in the consciousness, as the memorial of an abiding sense of need. Not indeed that acts and feelings which may provoke fresh sin, (with certain sins such a caution is deeply needed,) should be rekindled into life, but that the general, the pervading consciousness of sin requires often to be deepened by the remembrance of the past, that the thirsty soul of the penitent may thus drink in more eagerly the dew of benediction. This may well be more especially suggested as a Lenten rule. One of the reasons, perhaps, why memory has such an awfully retentive power is, that the sin of one's life may always live with us, even when the new life of God has taken its place. God has impressed His own eternity on the sinner's conscience, that his past may ever be present, the more surely at last to be obliterated, through the vivid horror of the retentive conscience ever pleading for renewed mercy. Even while grace casts a veil over the past, covering transgression with a true oblivion in the full free pardon of the Atonement, God suffers the letters of the handwriting which was against us to be still dimly legible, as of a palimpsest manuscript, through the characters of the new law which the Spirit has traced over the fading marks of fallen nature's workmanship. Even together

with, and through, the glory of the newly imparted life, we retain the shadow of the darkness out of which we have been delivered, while gaining more and more the peace of a perfect freedom.

Recall therefore the hated past, not to diminish hope, but to increase godly sorrow ; not to cloud the vision of the Redeemer, but to deepen the sense of His loving forgiveness ; not to lessen the recovered power, but to infuse into this power a profounder tenderness ; not to separate from God, but to unite with Him by a firmer and a closer bond. Review the past, that a deeper penitence may awake in the present. Deepen the penitence, that a tenderer spirit may enter into the life ; that a deepening tenderness may receive a greater grace. Seek to be found at last in the humility of the returning Prodigal, who, having cast all away to win heaven, returns in his homeward track with the one end absorbing all other thoughts and aims, and yet preserves the thought that the hired servant's place in his own Father's home is all he merits and can claim. Look well and see, not merely if there be any way of wickedness in you, but what your repentance has been, its motives, its depths, its reality, the truth of its sorrow, the honesty of its purpose, the fulness of its resolves, the perseveringness of its resistance of sin, its progress from grace to grace, and "from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD."

How many have failed, because too soon they left off their penitential garb, and ceased to utter their penitential acts ! How many stunted growths even of true life have there been, in consequence of imperfect repentances ! How many, all their life long, are beset with old sins, and lingering returns of early vice, because their foundations were not laid

low, nor grounded on an acceptable penance! Try your very repentance, that it be a repentance not to be repented of. Bear in mind that the very terror of the Judgment consists in the startling truth, that it must fall first on the heirs of the kingdom. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"¹

¹ 1 S. Peter iv. 17, 18.

LECTURE II.

FORGIVING LOVE THE MOTIVE OF PENITENCE.

ROMANS V. 8.

“BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARDS US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.”

WHAT was the motive of the Atonement? is a question often asked, and variously answered. The blessed truth itself is revealed at the very opening of the Revelation vouchsafed to us, and pervades it even to its close. But the reasons operating on the Mind of God, and leading to this stupendous dispensation of His love, lie far beyond our reach, in the secrets of His predetermination. God might have saved the fallen race by other means than His own sufferings and Death, had He so willed. Why He so willed, and not otherwise, is not revealed to us.

But though we cannot determine the reasons directing the Mind of God to choose this mode of saving man, we may clearly gather from the Scriptures, that there were moral fitnesses in the Atonement being effected as it was, and not otherwise. It was man who sinned; it was fitting that Man should suffer. The sin of man was disobedience; it was fitting that his sin should be atoned for by a perfect obedience.

The inner spring of that disobedience was pride ; it was fitting that the obedience which atoned for it, should be paid in the extremest form of humiliation. The penalty of man's sin was death ; it was fitting that the endurance of Death should be the means of atonement. Thus far the vision is made clear to us. "Obedience unto Death, even the death of the Cross" of shame, had true essential fitnesses and correspondence with the evil which was to be atoned.

There was moreover a fitness between this amazing act of Divine Love, and our own instinctive susceptibilities. And it is this which S. Paul urges in the text. Our natural instincts and affections are moved by disinterested love, suffering generously in our stead, especially when we have no claim to it, rather have deserved the very reverse. This motive affects us beyond every other that we can conceive. Love especially moves our whole being. Love suffering for us raises that impulse to the highest pitch. When all this is most gratuitous ; when we have injured the very person who thus loves us, and suffers for us, nay, have deserved his anger rather than his love, we are moved to the utmost enthusiasm, we are overcome, we yield ourselves passively to our Benefactor.

This is the Apostle's argument in the verses preceding the text. He is speaking of the soul's conversion, of being "justified by faith ;" of "peace with God ;" of "access by faith into this grace in which we stand ;" of "rejoicing ;" of "glorying even in tribulations." Afterwards he proceeds to speak of what had moved the soul to embrace this state. It was, he says, "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY GHOST, Which is given unto us." Then he adds the motive which quickens this love of the con-

verted soul to such amazing energy. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time CHRIST died for the ungodly." Then he appeals for his explanation to human instincts, which carry with them their own conviction. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us." In this appeal he has reached, according to the irresistible logic of the human heart, the climax of an enthusiastic influence over us. Man yields himself, because God has set in motion the most moving forces of His Divine love under its most impressive form, to rouse into rapturous energy the most susceptible passions of his nature. The Apostle rises to a very ecstasy at the thought possessing him, when he thus concludes; "But we also joy" (literally, exult) "in God, through our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by Whom we have now received the Atonement."

It is one of the wonderful orderings of the SPIRIT, that when He would reveal some great mystery, He selects as His inspired instrument one who by circumstance and special gift is most capable of feeling its power as a personal experience in his own soul. How striking an instance is it of this truth, that while S. James, noted for his stern austerities and high consistent virtue, is selected to teach pre-eminently the necessity of good works, S. Paul, struck in his mid career of indignant violence against the very Name of JESUS, and suddenly changed into a willing, childlike captive by the pure impression of undeserved love awakening his passionate nature to intensest gratitude to his Benefactor, revealing CHRIST in him,—is made the agent for expressing in his peculiarly fervent elo-

quence this great truth of the power of repentance awakened even in a hardened soul by the manifestation of the unutterable mercy shown in the special way in which the Atonement was effected. This consciousness thrills like a deep undertone through all his Epistles. One other instance of his glowing language, when speaking of this subject, may be added: "But God Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with CHRIST (by grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in CHRIST JESUS; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through CHRIST JESUS."¹

How intimately the life of penitence depends on this perception of the love shown in the Atonement, is evidenced by some remarkable illustrations in the lives of others noted in Scripture for the depth of their repentance. David is the penitent of the Old Covenant, and, if we may draw any conclusion from the amount of details of the Passion, which his Psalms contain, none of the ancient prophets could have more habitually lived in the contemplation of the Atonement. His secret feeding on the great Sacrifice of Love, must have prepared him for that gift of "the broken and contrite heart," in which he returned to God after his deadly sin. In the New Testament by far the most preternatural energy of penitence was exhibited in the dying thief; and who was ever brought into such close sympathy with the suffering CHRIST, or ever saw with a more sudden flash of light the intense love of His patient obedience unto death?

¹ Ephes. ii. 4—7.

It is clear too that when our LORD pressed so clearly home, so urgently, on S. Peter the question, "Lovest thou Me?" He was intending to seal his early penitence with the most enduring constancy, and in order to this sought to establish him in the power of a responsive love to meet His own atoning love, which had first awakened it.

And this motive once aroused must needs be an ever advancing impulse. And as the heart is touched with a growing sense of the love of CHRIST, so the sense of the sin which caused the agony of His bleeding Heart, must also grow. And as true life increases, this sense of the love of CHRIST also increases. It is an endless circle, ever going forth and returning into itself, yet ever expanding, as life passes into God to return from God, a yet more developed life. As we become more capable of Divine love, so we apprehend it better. As we know His love more truly, so we grow to understand how much it cost to redeem our souls; and as we better appreciate the cost, the more we hate the sin which demanded the sacrifice. And as we hate and condemn our sin the more, the more deeply we advance in penitence. Penitence is grounded on the love of God, and so must deepen, as that love deepens.

There are three main causes why the remorseful sense of sin is stirred by the sight of the atoning sufferings of CHRIST. (1) Sin changed the life of the Incarnation. To take the flesh of man, must have been at all events humiliation to God, beyond all that we can conceive. But this union, this newly assumed life, might have been painless, might never have tasted sorrow, never shrunk with shame, never bowed beneath the burden of the faintest struggle. In one

undimmed, undisturbed progress from glory to glory of the shining out of the hidden Majesty of Godhead through the extremest beauty of perfected Humanity, He might have passed, and in Him all who are His, through a noviciate of unclouded bliss in man's first Paradise, the outer tabernacle of Heaven, until the time had come for the entrance into the innermost Presence, where God is All in all. But sin superinduced the dreadful Passion, and the Blood of the atoning Sacrifice. And as the sinner now looks at the prostrate Form in agony, or on the torn back, or on the gashed forehead, or at the Face streaming with gore ; or inwardly at the bleeding, fainting, breaking Heart,—he moans out its bitter lament, “My sin has done it.” The life of my God on earth in my nature would have been all peace, all light, all joy, all rest. But through my sin it became a struggle, a desolation, a darkness, and an agony of death.

(2) Again, sin is the continual renewal of the Passion. Many think that the crucifixion is wholly an event of the past, that our LORD then passed beyond the reach of human malice, or a creature's treachery. Outwardly He surely did so. He passed into an inner spiritual sphere, beyond the touch of this outer world. But there is an inward sense, through which He still feels the influence of what passes on earth. There is still a piercing of His Heart in His secret abode of peace ; and the Passion may be renewed, and the wounds may bleed afresh, and the Head may again be bowed in humiliation. We may “crucify the SON of GOD afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”¹ Not to speak of deadly sins of malice, and recklessness, and unbelief,—even as mere carelessness steals over the

¹ Heb. vi. 6.

soul's life, and love waxes cold, and some fresh fault is permitted, it is as though we were still repeating the cry ; "Crucify Him, crucify Him." We have forgotten what sin has cost. We are entailing the necessity of a fresh Sacrifice of Atonement. The precious Blood is gushing out again to cleanse that renewed guilt away.

And again (3,) sin annihilates the fruits of the Passion. What has been so dearly won, the revival of the Divine life in man, the restoration of the lost Image of God in the soul, the building up the Communion of Saints on earth, the returning of peace and love, and purity, and joy, and mutual kindnesses, and sweetness of sympathy, and gentleness of compassion, and high enthusiasm, and longing to shed itself forth in blessing others with unselfish, unsparing devotion,—all the elements of a higher life, which His Passion restored in reconciling God and man again in one Body, and now sustains by His own indwelling Presence in the Spirit Which through His Passion sheds Itself forth to form the new Creation,—all these results of His Sacrifice sin throws back, saddens, blights, crushes. It is an evil influence at work, and in proportion as it prevails, it is opposing Him Who suffers still in the hindrance of His own work, in the diminishing of the fulness of His own designs of mercy. Every indulgence of passion or selfishness, every stumbling-block cast in another's way, every evil example before another set, every impure contagion, every provocation of another's infirmity, every needless corroding of another's peace, every unkindness, every undutifulness, is the emptying our LORD of His own glory, purchased at the cost of His Blood.

The consciousness of these workings of sin grows on the true penitent, and with it grows the sense of what

it is to be forgiven. And as the sense of what we are forgiven, and what it cost Him to forgive, increases, so increases our penitence, and so life advances, stirred by such moving inducements to aim at higher things, enabling us the better and the more earnestly to follow Him Who loved us, and gave Himself to die for us.

It is not simply love which is the principle of growth, but forgiving love. Nor is it the immediate sense of the act of forgiveness, but the growing consciousness of forgiveness as a perpetual act of God through the continued offering of His Own Sacrifice. For it is not that we are forgiven once and for ever; nor merely that the sacramental act of absolving grace passes on the penitent in the hour of his confession. These are special applications, sealings of grace, like a Hand stretched forth, or a Voice heard out of the unseen world, revealed for the moment to touch the sensible frame of the penitent soul, and bid it go in peace and sin no more,—messengers coming out of the void and dim scene of ordinary life, to speak with the authority of God, breathing divine assurance within the soul, and communicating the sensible fruits of the Atonement, a prophet's response to the penitent moved to see and confess his sin,—“The LORD hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.”¹ These special acts are but the fuller breathings of a love which is beating with a continual pulse. Forgiveness to one who is in a state of grace, and in communion with God, is a perpetual unceasing act of grace. Even immediately after an absolution has been pronounced, we say the LORD's Prayer. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive,” &c., is still heard. The confession still speaks

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 13.

on. The attitude of penitence is preserved. The unceasing craving of the soul for the continued communication of the ever-absolving grace, is breathing still, even while the words of absolution are in the ear. The ever present need of forgiveness is cherished still. The ever constant leaning on forgiving love is perpetuated, and "as we seek, we find; as we ask, we receive; as we knock, it is opened to us." Love sealed by the Blood of Sacrifice, love breathing its unceasing intercession before the Throne, ever flows on, as pulses in the air, or as waves of light in the luminous atmosphere surrounding us radiate unceasingly from the unchanging impulses of the central Light, and we see only as these waves, in the infinite succession of their ceaseless pulsations, strike our organs of sight. Even so only as the continual forgiving of God for the love of CHRIST, reaches and passes into us in its continuous, endless energies of forgiving and cleansing grace, which knows no pause in its fulness of compassion and restoring life, do we live on in peace as the children of His adoption, the very members of Himself. It is the sense of this, the sense not merely of forgiveness, and the need of it, nor merely of the love which has purchased the power to forgive at so great a cost, but of the unceasingness of the act through an unceasing pleading and offering of Himself for the soul that seeks Him,—this sense is the principle of growing life, and so of growing penitential love and tears, and so of actual penitence.

But more follows from the same principle. Not merely growth in penitence deepens with this consciousness of forgiving love. But the character of the

¹ S. Matth. vii. 7.

penitence wholly depends on it. There is a vital difference in the kind of penitence produced. Of all the characteristics of a true penitence, tenderness is at once the most beautiful and the most expressive. While bodily mortification, however at times necessary, is, indirectly at least, beset with the danger of causing hardness and austerity of character, nay, even of feeding a subtle pride and self-complacency, the very greatness of its power to sanctify becoming a snare; and though being so sure a remedy of certain sins, yet risking the approach of others, it may be as hateful,—the sorrow for sin living in the perpetual sense of forgiving love, while preserving the soul in a constant penitence, acts upon the whole being with its divine energy, infusing a softness and a penetrating gentleness which keeps the whole spirit lowly, and yet fervent; meek, and yet confident; perpetually subduing self and self-esteem. It is the surest antidote to the universal clinging plague of self-consciousness, preserving the child-like creaturely dependence on the Heart of God, as a fount and stay of life. It works miracles in saving from sin quickly arising within if ever the soul loosen its hold on God, giving untold power in resisting temptation, which dies down, finding no part in one always secretly touched with a loving sorrow at the thought of past sin, for ever forgiven, yet still ever feared. Besides all these safeguards, this tenderness, as it pervades the soul, becomes in itself a character of beauty, which taking all possible shapes, enters into every feature and impulse of life; giving them an unwonted tone, a sweetness and a winningness, a new power of thoughtfulness and repose, a depth of pathos, most loveable, most religious. That most beautiful feature in the character of CHRIST, which arises from His intense perception of

the misery of sin, and His own loving sorrow over it, can be at all imitated by us, only as we learn to live in the deepening consciousness of our own sin, and of the power of His love and His pity in healing us.

The same cause, moreover, gives our penitence a peculiar largeness of sympathy and considerateness towards the faults and infirmities of others. Scarcely any lesson needs to be taught more earnestly than this. The temptation always besets the penitent, most especially in the early days of restored purity and new powers, to look with despising on others still weakly yielding to sins, from which himself had been delivered, or to which, though perhaps less evil than his own, he has not been exposed. There may even be a sharpness in speech, and an unkindness in judging, which has come on only since penitence began to work, as though it were an honouring of God to condemn what we have learnt to hate, though vengeance is His alone. We are readily exposed to the temptation to be vexed and fretted by others' faults, all the more that we think ourselves to be free. We are inclined to narrow our sympathies for the fallen, and our forbearance for the imperfect, all the more that grace raises us above them. There is a selfish interest in bearing others' faults, when conscious of our own. We are easily lenient when we need leniency. Sinners make a large allowance for the faults of their fellow-sinners. But it is a sign of a deepening penitence, when, as we gain power and increasing purity, we exhibit an enlarged considerateness, a more generous forbearance, a greater tendency to pity, a kinder speech, and a gentler thought, for another's frailty or folly. This true grace of a real contrition can be learnt scarcely in any other school than

in the love of the Atonement. We enlarge our heart's compassionateness, as we grow into the same feeling which moves the Heart of JESUS towards ourselves.

It does not follow, that we grieve less at the fault, because we are become more gentle to the faulty. We are not more favourable to the sin, because we are large-hearted in consideration for the sinner. The very reverse is more truly the result. But even to the last we need diligently to cherish this great grace. We can never safely forget the solemn warning against the lack of such a spirit, which the parable conveys. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee."¹ The great law which our LORD gave for almsgiving, applies as strongly to mutual forbearance. "Freely ye have received, freely give."² This, His own Spirit, was intended to enter into His elect. He won us, because forgiving He did not upbraid us. He holds us still, now that we are forgiven, because He bears with so much faultiness still remaining in us. We are enthralled, led captive, penetrated with His dear love, because He has covered all our transgressions; and what remains, He mentions not against us. If we tell Him of them, He consoles us, even while we offend Him. Even as we sin, He is our Advocate, our Comforter.

Breathe over us, within us, LORD, the same forgiving, forgetting, forbearing spirit. LORD of love and pity, may we be, even as Thou art in this world; and Thou art Love, and "whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." And Thy Word has spoken;

¹ S. Matth. xviii. 32, 33.

² S. Matth. x. 8.

“He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”¹

It is a law, which our common instinct recognizes, and has thus become a proverb, that like is drawn to like. A perpetual action and reaction is passing around, within us, through the power of forgiving love. It drew us without ourselves, and as we experience its blessedness, it draws us all the more; and as it draws us to others who have experienced the same love, it draws them and us together to Him, Who has thus loved us in one Body; and as we are thus drawn together in a community of conscious oblivion of the past and hope for the future, the spirit of penitence breathes out in a fuller, freer, richer glow, uniting us with each other, and with Him, Who is the Source and ever present Food of this blessed fellowship. Such grace must needs be the groundwork of new forms of life, manifesting themselves not only in our own character, but in our feeling and conduct toward others who, having the same needs, have found the same mercy. Therefore the Scriptures urge so unceasingly the call to mutual forgiveness and forbearing, as among the very essential characteristics of a life redeemed and renewed in the love of CHRIST. Therefore such full and stirring exhortations breathe throughout the Epistles; “CHRIST is All and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as CHRIST forgave you, so also do ye. And above these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfect-

¹ 1 S. John iv. 16, 20.

ness." Then instantly follows the sure result ; " And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one Body ; and be ye thankful."¹

He hath more than forgiven us. He will change us forgiven into the image of His own forgiving love. He would perpetuate on earth in the hearts of His faithful through all ages this His special grace, to be the motive power of winning other souls. He will make us to be even as Himself, to love and forbear, even as Himself loves and forbears, ever covering evil with good. He will thus make us instruments of His own mercy, co-workers with Himself in diffusing the blessed results of His Atonement, even in the same spirit in which He offered, and evermore applies It. Nor, if we grow thus into union with Him, is there any power of grace in Himself, which He may not impart, Whose first act of love was to love us even when we were yet sinners. " He that spared not His own SON, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."²

¹ Col. iii. 11—15.

² Rom. viii. 32.

LECTURE III.

THE REPROOF OF THE SPIRIT THE POWER OF CONVERSION.

S. JOHN XVI. 8.

“HE WILL REPROVE THE WORLD OF SIN, AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,
AND OF JUDGMENT.”

OUR LORD had been speaking of His own removal into the unseen world, the consequent Advent of the Blessed Comforter, and the gain that would thence ensue to His elect. “It is expedient for you that I go away.”¹ Among other blessings, destined to flow forth on the coming of that Blessed Spirit, depended the hope of a true conviction of sin. Our LORD speaks of the effect of the HOLY SPIRIT’S Advent, as though there had been no consciousness of sin awakened till then; because, by contrast of the greater work wrought by His Presence, all former convictions would seem to have been as nothing. “He shall reprove the world,”—as though the world had not been reproved before. This reproofing, or convincing,² as

¹ S. John xvi. 7.

² ἐλέγχω, certis et indubitatis argumentis alicui aliquid persuadeo et demonstro ac dissentientes refuto. (Schl.) “He will not only convict the world of sin, in not believing the Gospel,

the word more strictly means, which the Spirit would effect in the heart of the world, or rather in all hearts capable of receiving it, embraced three objects together, which are represented as co-extensive, and alike continuous—sin, righteousness, and judgment. The revealing to the soul of man the fulness of his sins,—the revealing the completeness of the righteousness of God,—the revealing the completeness of God's condemnation of evil,—are set before us as a threefold work advancing together, and perfected together.

As we know our LORD's righteousness, which was to be manifested in its completeness only in His union with the FATHER at His Ascension,—“because I go to the FATHER, and ye see Me no more,”—and the fulness of God's righteous judgment on all that He hateth,—“because the prince of this world is judged”²—so do we know the full extent of sin, which is the loss and contradiction of that righteousness, and the object of that condemnation. Thus the knowledge of sin must continue to increase, as the knowledge of God's righteousness and of God's judgments increases; and as this more perfect sense of sin increases, so will penitence increase.

The first lecture spoke of the slowness with which

but of *sinfulness* generally; by showing that it needed so great a sacrifice as My Death to reconcile it to God, and that all who do not receive Me as their SAVIOUR are yet in their sins, and in danger of perdition. Ep. Cyril. (Maldonat.)” “The word signifies in the New Testament a process of argument, generally public, by which an offender is proved to be such, and is ‘pricked to the heart,’ and ‘smitten in conscience,’ and put to shame, and brought to repentance by salutary rebuke and reproof, or although callous in himself, yet manifestly proved and convicted as a sinner in the eyes of others.” (Dr. Wordsworth in loc.)

¹ S. John xvi. 10.

² Ib. xvi. 11.

the sense of sin breaks in upon the soul's consciousness, first as a mere fact in a child's history, needing to be explained; then in its outward misery and punishment; and lastly in its inward experience, as a diseased condition of the soul.

But even when sin is thus revealed as an inner corruption affecting the whole state of the soul, how slowly does this light break in, how slowly pass from one form of sin existing in us to another! Throughout the Old Testament history, as was before observed, the slow and imperfect conviction of sin is one of the most striking facts it reveals regarding the condition of man. This may be the case even after deadliest sins. Most commonly indeed deadly sin aggravates the natural incapacity of the conscience, and is followed by an insensibility far beyond what is caused by ordinary faults. In David's case, before any consciousness of sin could be awakened, a prophet's solemn remonstrance, and the touching parable of the ewe lamb, were needed. So dark, so slow to apprehend was even an inspired soul.¹ How striking, on the contrary, is the state which S. Paul describes in the Corinthian disciples, who, as a whole body stirred together, sorrowed bitterly over the sin of one of their members. Only one had sinned; but S. Paul addresses them all as alike concerned, alike quickened to the most anxious sensitiveness, though only awakened by sympathy with a brother's fall. "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves

¹ 2 Sam. xii.

to be clear in this matter.”¹ The Spirit had come with a power unknown before, and worked this new fervour of penitence.

And as this increased sensitiveness to sin is clearly seen on a broad scale in the latter days of man’s history, the same is true in the individual soul’s life. We have one conscience laid bare to us, the workings of a wonderful grace of God in the record of one great mind, bequeathed in its details for the thoughtful study of all mankind. It is the history, indeed, of one as yet unbaptized; but that early history of preventing grace which developed into the exalted spiritual gifts of the great teacher of Western Christendom is, in its deep strugglings, far beyond that of most of the regenerate in their efforts for deliverance. S. Augustine, in his “Confessions,” is a notable sign how slowly and with what uncertainties, how irresolutely and through what long intervals, with what reluctance and misgivings, with what partial views and clouded visions, by what gradual, intermittent, conflicting processes of illumination, and strugglings of the unrenewed mind, repentance forces its way,—the Divine love ever preserving him so that he could not draw back, yet evil still retaining its deceitful hold; fresh lights of grace ever illumining him, but large portions of his soul still remaining so dark. He wills, and then soon wills no more; he demands of God to be freed from his bondage, and at the same time fears lest God should hear him, and his prayers be answered. All the while he was advancing on towards the increasing light, his soul quickened to see more and more of its foulness, as it saw more and more of the righteousness of God, till at last the light flashed in with power overbearing all obstacles; and final deliverance had come.

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 11.

Few of us there are but must remember the first strong sense of sin smiting us. The immediate cause may have been a sentence in a book, or some one's chance remark, or an unexpected rebuke, or a sudden fear, a flash of light breaking in, we know not how, but it awakened a dormant sense. It was a crisis that can never be forgotten. Such is the experience not merely of those plunged in deadly sins, habitually, passionately indulged ; but, even if any of us were free from these, still the history of the eventful change has ever been the same. There are regenerate souls, blessed be God, that have been kept remarkably calm, progressing under a continuous, careful discipline, in a life gradually unfolding into the glory of the quiet reign of grace over nature. Still, even in these rarer cases, yea, in all who have known the reproofing power of the Spirit, a like conviction is experienced ; and there remains an undying remembrance of this crisis in their history, the first strong smiting of the conscience, from whence they date a change which has determined the most momentous issues of their soul's life. We may call this change a renewal, in these lighter cases, to distinguish it from the transition from yet more grievous sins, ordinarily understood as conversion ; but it is a crisis in all alike never to be forgotten. From that hour the spirit of self-condemnation, then awakened, spreads and enlarges into the ever-growing convictions of a true penitence. It is accompanied, in every really quickened soul, with the feeling that there is much yet behind on which the Spirit's reproof will fall ; that the very condition of advance is the seeing sins undiscerned before, and understanding faults that never appeared to be faults till now. And as the blessed vision of our LORD's life grows, the past penitence that seemed once to be complete, is more and

more felt to be a very hypocrisy, at least an utter falling short of what one's real sin called for; the increasing perception of His holiness acting on the soul as an ever-fresh incentive to ever-deepening repentance.

The earliest token of the reproof of the Spirit within the soul is the gift of sorrow, through the newly awakened consciousness of personal guilt. It has been often observed that our LORD never smiled. How could He smile, Whose Eye was ever gazing on sin, and its consequences of misery; Whose Mind always saw His Passion, as the fruit of sin, with a vivid unchanging consciousness? And sorrow kindred with His own is an inalienable ingredient of the inner life quickened to see sin revealed within itself, and the more so, as it is more perfectly being formed after His likeness; for the more clearly the soul sees Him, the more it sees its own sin, which caused His sorrow. "Godly sorrow," i.e., the sorrow according to God, the Divine sorrow, "*worketh* repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of;"¹ i.e., continues to work as an ever-present impulse, a perpetual, active agent within the inner depths of the soul, continually advancing the penitence which is perfected only when salvation, which knows no place for repentance, is secured.

There are changes in the character of the sorrow, marking the progressive working of the Spirit, of Whose Presence it is the blessed fruit. At first impetuous, impatient as to too easy forgiveness, eager for mortification and self-revenge, incapable of rest, excitable, absorbed, at times gloomy, fearful, with dark, troubled visions, and exaggerated, austere judgments,—such is the conscience-stricken sinner's earlier sorrow.

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

This, however, is but transient. It subsides into a calmer state; it becomes humble, accompanied with solemn and reverential, not uneasy, fears of God's inscrutable judgments, tender, sober, quiet, dealing gently, not indulgently, with self; not as before, gushing into tears, yet with tears never far off; quickly melting into prayer, with self-reproaches rising often to the surface, but soon sinking down into hidden depths; never demonstrative, yet always thoughtful; never downcast at falls, but tending ever to greater watchfulness; nor seeking consolation, because possessing its own hidden manna, which it would not barter away for any joy; trembling even at the joy of God, lest it lose its own sweet sadness, treasured as the very safeguard of its life.¹ Penitential sorrow is like the torrent from the mountain, at first rushing down its steep bed among the rocks, afterwards more quietly stealing and winding amidst the still pastures.

But this more quiet flow of "godly sorrow" is often broken. In its later stages, even in advanced souls, something of the violence of its early state will at times manifest itself. Gushes of renewed anguish will be awakened at some vivid kindling of Divine love, or at a fresh sight of some perhaps comparatively trivial fault, now grieving the soul as bitterly, as of old it mourned the deadly fall. The faint shades of lingering imperfection have assumed to the quickened consciousness the proportions of a deadly sin, because the eyes of the renewed spirit have been more keenly purged; and seeing more truly the righteousness of God, and feeling more acutely the judgment of God, the soul trembles now at the very least variance from His per-

¹ I have borrowed some expressions from Mr. Faber's description of this stage of the spiritual life, in his "Growth in Holiness."

fect will. But the quieter sorrow has become the abiding normal state, and settles down, as faith grows to be a ground of character, and a special sanctity.

A temptation often arises to think the sorrow is gone, or is weaker, because it is less sensational. But is not a similar change to that which takes place in godly sorrow, manifested likewise in the truest natural love? Love is at first all impetuous sentiment, restless, greedy of extreme expressions, violent in its flow. Does it not become a deeper, more exalted passion, just in proportion as it becomes a well of life springing up in constant duty, unfailing kindness, self-denying charities, fervent prayer? It has lost indeed something of its demonstrativeness; it has gained a more perfect hold on the sources of a higher life. So neither has godly sorrow failed, because it has become a calmer law of duty, and made penitence less of an excitement, more of a conformity with a higher righteousness.

Signs of the increasing power of the reproof of the Spirit are shown in the efforts aroused to overcome the actual working of sin within the soul. S. Augustine has said that, while we are certain of the reality of our sin, we cannot be as absolutely certain of the truth of our penitence. Nor indeed can we prove our repentance so directly as we prove our sin. We may have an assurance of its truth as real and as convincing; but we can only prove it by inference derived from its practical fruits. When the Spirit's work of conviction has reached such a depth within us, that the source out of which sin arises is known, and is being healed, we have the surest possible evidence of its reality.

But here an explanation is needed. Sin does not arise from pure malice. However corrupted the nature of man, he does not love sin *as sin*. Such an extreme perversion belongs only to demons. It has even been doubted whether the malice of demons reaches to the direct love of sin. But in man the sinful love is for the weakness, the self-indulging tendency that leads to evil, not to the evil viewed nakedly in itself. We love the pleasure which God has forbidden, but not because He has forbidden it; the pleasure, not the very stain or guilt of it. We love the gratification of the passion, but not the impurity that results. We love the profit of the unjust bargain, not the actual injustice. We love the revenge because of the gratification of the false sense of honour, but not the criminal spirit of retaliation in itself. We should always desire to separate the two, were it possible. Even the abandoned sinner would desire, were it practicable, to separate off the injury done to God, and the ruin caused to his own nature, from the immediate gratification of the sinful impulse. In a word, we wish to please ourselves, and yet not to sin. It is because the two things are practically inseparable, and the desire of self-gratification carries the soul beyond the fear of the sin, that we sin. Without loving the sin, nay even while hating it, we sin nevertheless. We sin, because of the satisfaction which the sin procures; because the sinner loves the cause and source of sin, loves the passion of the hour, and so spite of himself, spite of his better mind, spite of his wish to please God, were the pleasing Him consistent with pleasing self, he sins.¹

¹ I am indebted to Bourdaloue's sermons for some thoughts of which I have availed myself in this and the two following lectures.

We see here the first principle of our fall. The weak tendency to indulgence is the matter or cause of sin, not the malice. It is not therefore by the hatred of sin, as sin, that we can distinguish the imperfect from the true penitent ; for even hardened sinners may retain this hatred of sin, as sin.

By what sign, then, can we discern a true from a false penitence ? It is by the cutting off, actually and effectually mortifying in ourselves, whatever we discern to be the cause of sin, that which foment it, what causes it to subsist ; by removing what S. Paul calls "the body of sin," its matter, its form within us ; by striking at the weakness which, yielding, causes sin. It is by the renunciation of the manifold seductive enthralling objects and influences which to the carnal mind form the false sweetness of life ; by fleeing the occasions which excite in our hearts the poisonous desires ; by the severe determination, the sacred violence which forces the soul from the enchanted spell of vanity, or lust, or sloth, or pride, or self-love, with which the syren's harp charms the conscience to sleep, and leads the higher nature of the child of God as a willing captive in its train of voluptuous votaries. In a word, it is that circumcision of the heart, which not pausing at a mere superficial change of outward action, strips from off the inner sensitive heart that clinging besetting disposition, which to the individual soul is the whole cause and origin of the sin.

The voice of true penitence says ; "I know my weakness. I watch against it. I avoid its occasions. I resist its sway. I use all means to struggle against it. I mortify its gratifications. I cling to God in it. I cry to Him. And this all the more, as I feel it the more. I lay hold with the deeper resolve, the more I

feel my sinking in the waters. And by His grace it is being subdued, its influence in me is lessened." How contrary is the false, or self-pleasing penitence! It is when the soul, notwithstanding its professions, its resolutions, even its earnest prayers, exposes itself to the same temptations, allows itself in the same occasions, places itself in the same perils, watches indolently, uses little mortification, while yet mourning its falls; and having thus but a faint hold on God, when the critical hour of trial comes, as surely soon it reappears, sins again and again because the weakness prevails as of old. The Spirit's convicting, reproving work is in such a case but partially done. He has revealed to the startled soul the evil concealed within. He has opened the fount of tears. But He has not stirred the energies of resistance. He has not awakened the slumbering powers of true self-denial. The better mind is forming; not its power of self-discipline, its strength of self-renunciation and self-sacrifice. The Spirit has reproved the heart of sin, but not of righteousness, not of judgment.

It is on account of this eventful difference that the groundwork of spiritual honesty needs to be deeply laid. The great test of sincerity is awfully enforced in our SAVIOUR'S words: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"¹ To know one's own weakness, to know that this weakness involves sin; and yet to shrink from the needful effort, from cutting off the dangerous occasion,—what is this but hypo-

¹ S. Matth. vi. 22, 23.

crisy? To confess one's weakness, and the fall it caused, to seek for absolution and peace; and yet no change to follow,—what but the hypocrite's false anodyne? To be honest with God is, alas! one of the rarest gifts. There is a subtle dishonesty, which is one of the most frequently besetting sins of the devout. Convictions of sin are not wanting. Tears are not wanting. Resolutions are not wanting. The vision of righteousness and of judgment is ever present to the mind. What is wanting is the honest dealing with one's own weaknesses and the occasions of our falls. Even as it is the triumph of the revealing power of the Spirit, to show to the soul its real self, to show selfishness its special character of selfishness; so it is the triumph of the transforming power of the Spirit, to save the soul from the consequences of its own characteristic weakness, constraining and empowering it to turn away from the ensnaring object, to refuse to yield to the seductive sweetness.

We have thus marked the progress of the work of penitence through the Spirit's blessed agency. We have also seen how penitence becomes real, and advances to its end through the same agency. And we have as yet no experience of a perfection in which penitence has not its work to do. We in truth advance, as the sense of sin becomes more keen, and faults more earnestly resisted; and these are the conditions of a true repentance. Not the greatest sinner, but the greatest saint, is therefore the most perfect penitent.

It has been before remarked, how the HOLY SPIRIT selects for His instruments in revealing His mind, special persons who are themselves distinguished for

the practical manifestation of the truths revealed. S. John the Baptist was the great preacher of repentance, and his "raiment of camel's hair," his "girdle about his loins," his meat of "locusts and wild honey," tell of an inner man mortifying his flesh in the deepest humiliation of penitential sorrow. While he cleansed the multitudes who confessed before him the sins of their renounced lives, was not his power laid in the fact that his own lifelong work had been by vigil, and prayer, by loneliness and abstinence, to purge away the darkness of the flesh that hid from his longing gaze the blessed vision of the promised Messiah? And yet he was sanctified from his mother's womb. Of all men "born of woman there was none greater than John the Baptist." And he went before the very Face of the LORD, His chosen messenger, to prepare His way. Of what then had he to repent? What exemption from sin was involved in the special gift of the HOLY GHOST almost coeval with his conception, is not revealed; but even if no actual sin were committed, if the sanctification from the womb guarded him from any single fall, yet he bore within him the fount, the cause, of all possible sin, the outgoings of which he read, if not in his own consciousness, yet in the records of humanity around him. He felt, he saw, through his greater light, the seeds of evil within himself. He could sit beside the sources of human corruption, and mourn over the consciousness of weakness, the liability to every hateful thing hidden within him. He had to watch the constant possibility of a fall, and thus could trace within himself the very kindred marks which bound him to the sinful race. He had learnt to reprove the sin which lurked, though perpetually restrained, within himself, and so disci-

plined he could all the more earnestly reprove its outgoings in the world.

So must it always be. Penitence will deepen as the saint advances to his perfectness, because the brightening illumination has contrasted the more vividly with even the hidden seminal forms of sin, and weaknesses of the flesh in which the still imprisoned spirit lingers. As was observed before, the deepest act of penitence will surely be within the veil ; when the soul sees its LORD, and in His unvailed Righteousness experiences at length the true and adequate expression of sorrow, the full hatefulness of the law of unrighteousness in himself, as he abases himself in his last penitential act before the Face of the Living God. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own SON in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."¹ Though we walk in the power of the Spirit, we are encompassed with the infirmities of the flesh ; and the sainted soul needs still to be clothed in sackcloth, even while the sevenfold light of the glory of God is shed around the brow. How striking is it that the very last, the closing gift of the Spirit, of which Isaiah speaks, and which our LORD appropriated to Himself, is the "fear of the LORD!"² Is it that this more penitential grace closes the series, because it is the basis on which the others rest ; or that, when perfected, it becomes, as embodying all true creaturely consciousness, the highest expression of all the rest ; or is it as being a vital need for our safety, mercifully mentioned last, in order that it may rest latest and freshest on the heart ? Even

¹ Rom. viii. 3, 4.

² Isa. xi. 2.

our LORD "was heard, in that He feared."¹ So true He was to the created nature which He assumed into His Godhead, that He would rest His own acceptance on the truth of this most creaturely attribute of His humility, and thus sanctify and honour the grace which most becomes the state of penitence.

The time was when the title of sanctity would never be granted unless beneath the outward garb, even though it were of richest materials, the penitential vest, the shirt of discipline, was seen. It might have been a mere outward form, assumed often with rude and repulsive aspect; but it symbolized a deep inner truth. The feeling was grounded on a Divine instinct. It had caught the profound scriptural truth, that even after all outward need of penance had seemingly passed, it was only because it had become more habitual, to be found as the abiding grace of the soul, its hidden but constant clothing; the inner penitence guarding the secret life, and become the strength and safety of its developed sanctity, the assurance of its sincerity, of its consistency, of its deep penetrating lowliness.

Therefore it is that Lent returns again and again, and will unceasingly re-appear, till the last Easter break on the ransomed world, ever the most welcome season, because the redeemed soul then afresh pours forth its renewed tears in union with the Passion of the Man of Sorrows, and re-invigorates its strength in the deepening foundations of a more complete humiliation, rising through lowlier soberer fears to greater heights of heavenly ardour, and closer communion with God.

The Voice of the Spirit is then heard speaking more

¹ Heb. v. 7.

and more clearly; "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, or when ye turn to the left."¹ It is the voice of Divine reproof never ceasing in this day of our probation, that at last reproof may be heard no more. It awakens the ever rising confession, the "I have sinned," echoing on into the silence of the invisible world, that the, "Thou shalt not die," may at length be heard from the Eternal Throne. It is the fear which has lost all its torment, mingling still in the perfect love which has cast out all its fearfulness.

The words of reproof, if thus accepted and understood, are welcomed as the most precious accent of the Voice of the Blessed Spirit. It smites that it may heal. "Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It is the Voice which is ever perfecting His work of love, converting the soul,—whether it speaks directly from God Himself, inwardly reproofing, or, more searching still, through the instrumentality of others, our fellow-creatures. It is still the one greatest assurance of mercy saving our life, lest in our sins we perish, lest the unrebuked fault follow us to the grave, left to mar our transformed state, our hope of likeness to Himself. The warning, the check, the humiliation is seen to be the highest form of love, love hidden for a time, to be soon recognized. Its pain has quickly passed; its saving virtue penetrates and works, the assurance of a continual advance, the parent of lowliness, the pledge of every fault being overcome, the seal of the promised indwelling of the Spirit, the proof of our LORD's Ascension to complete His triumph in His redeemed. The faithful are bidden thus to strive together for their

¹ Isa. xxx. 21.

common hope, not suffering sin to remain, mutually quickening one another, as in one Body they draw near. "Come," the unceasing witness pleads, "and let us return unto the LORD: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." And the promise is quickly fulfilled; "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."¹

¹ Hosea vi. 1, 3.

LECTURE IV.

CONFESSION.

PSALM LI. 3.

"I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY SIN IS EVER
BEFORE ME."

WE have considered the chief moving causes of a true penitence, the love of the Atonement, awakening godly sorrow and desire of amendment, and the indwelling Presence of the HOLY SPIRIT, converting the inner life into harmony with the Divine Will. We have, moreover, noted some leading signs and expressions of penitence, as its work spreads and deepens within the soul. We need still further to consider the active correspondence and co-operation of the soul with these supernatural workings of the Divine Persons, Who have come forth, imparting to us this higher life. The music of the lyre is given out, when stirred by the breath of heaven, and the harmony thrills and spreads vibrating along all its chords. So with the soul, as the Divine Agents of a true penitence breathe over it. It gives out its own responsive notes, vibrating through all the powers and impulses of life.

There is need of a careful study of the constituent

elements of a true practical repentance ; for, according to a well-known saying of S. Augustine, it is easier to lead a consistently pure life than to repent well ; easier to preserve grace given, than to recover it in its fulness when lost. The second baptism, as repentance was called by the early Church, was ever deemed to be more painful and laborious than the first. One of the most notable controversies stirred within the early Church, is that touching the comparative strictness of penitence. The Novatians, on the one side, excluded many from the possible hope of acceptable repentance in this world ; while the sects opposed to them admitted all alike with equal ease. This same controversy must in truth ever live on, through the natural divergence of men's minds in these two directions ; some inclining more to leniency, others to severity. Need it be said, of which extremes we at least in our age are in greatest danger ? But it is surely the most alarming, as it is the strangest, although the most common, evidence of our natural self-indulgence, that we allow our laxity to enter into our penitence ; allow the very cause of our sin to enter into that which is alone its remedy,—our weakness of disposition, which caused our ruin, repeated again to mar our only possible hope of recovery.

The text indicates one main feature of the workings of the soul's inner life, which necessarily comes first in the order of penitential grace. The acknowledgment of sin is often the only possible reparation for sin ; as it is the one absolutely, and in all cases required. It is the impulse, which gushes out the most spontaneously,—the “ I have sinned against the LORD,” which is ever, as it was in David's case, the first sign of the

breaking down of the soul's hardness, of its yielding to the new quickening of life which has begun the work of restoration.

It may be supposed that confession is peculiarly and alone the sinner's personal humiliation ; that in this act there can be nothing in common between him and his LORD. That He should bear the penalty of sin, we may understand ; but that He should also know in Himself the humiliating acknowledgment of sin, is less conceivable. This shame, it would seem, must be exclusively reserved to the fallen creature. Yet our LORD's love for us has stooped even to share with us this humiliation. Indeed this manifestation of His love forms the most touching aspect under which He reveals Himself. The mystery of His humiliation is, not merely that, passing out of the unapproachable light in which He was veiled from His creatures, He took the flesh to become thenceforth and for ever His own nature, assuming the limitations and infirmities of the least intelligent of the intelligent creatures ; it is not merely that GOD died, yielding Himself to the worst and most shameful penalties of the sin of His fallen creatures. The vision which presents itself to us is that of GOD as a Penitent, for sins indeed not His own, but as if they were His own.

Our LORD gave a startling indication of this acceptance of the penitent's lot, and the penitent's shame, at the very commencement of the life of His Incarnation. Such was the mystery of the Circumcision. That sign was specially the sinner's mark. It implied that whoever bore it needed cleansing, the cutting away the foulness of the flesh. By it therefore our LORD at once openly sealed Himself to be for ever thenceforward associated with the line of sinners, as one of themselves,

bearing thus in His own Person a witness which must for ever condemn Him before the world,—a public confession of His sharing the disease of sin, in common with all His brethren in the flesh. He descended from heaven, and made the first act of His Sacrifice in taking the sinner's mark to be indelibly impressed on His Person ; the sin for which He was to suffer already acknowledged as His own. It was the morning sacrifice, as the Cross was the sacrifice of the evening.

It is a remarkable feature of the life of the Incarnation, that It repeats Itself in all Its greater developments. Thus the three days' separation from His parents, to be found by them in His FATHER'S sanctuary, was the anticipatory picture of the three days' separation in His burial, to re-appear in the Majesty of the Resurrection within the Veil. So again the Transfiguration was the temporary outshining of the Glory which was to become in its fulness the permanent clothing of His perfected Humanity. Even so while our LORD fulfilled throughout His life, in small equally as in great things, the idea of penance,—in us an inevitable necessity, in Him alone a voluntary and assumed self-sacrifice,—there were certain great acts in which the acknowledgment of the sin which He had assumed as His own, was more distinctly made, great crises, before which we may well pause with amazement.

The Agony was the hour when, within His suffering human Soul, JESUS received the full consciousness of the countless sins of all generations of mankind, and, as the storm of Divine wrath swept over Him, and forced down His penitent form among the roots of the olive trees in the garden, clotted with the great drops of the Bloody Sweat, He was making His confession ;

owning Himself the willing and unshrinking bearer of the accumulated iniquities of His brethren in the flesh. He was acknowledging their transgressions, as His own; and their concentrated "sin," as though Himself the sinner, was "ever before Him."

While this was the one specially atoning acceptance of His meritorious Passion, in which the full pressure of the transferred sin of mankind sank into His quivering darkened Soul,—the seal of His offering of Himself in death as the representative of the doomed race,—there were anticipations of this mystery of humiliation. As the Circumcision was the first expression of the willingness to bear the shame of a sinner's destiny, so again in His Baptism our Lord publicly exhibited Himself as a Penitent. As He appeared in the crowd among those who had been stirred by Divine grace to seek the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," no wonder the Baptist started back, and "forbade Him, saying; I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"¹ But that forbidding would have frustrated for ever the hope of the fallen world. The Atoner for human guilt must acknowledge it in His own Person. It must be "ever" before Him, even from the beginning. And as He stooped entering the waters, and they flowed down from His head, falling around His form, enveloping the nakedness of His human nature, in its acknowledged need of entire cleansing, He was voluntarily placing Himself in the position of the sinful race, confessing its sins, and its need of cleansing, as His own, that He might bear those sins away, as no longer ours, to be blotted out for ever in the fulness of a perfected reconciliation with God. In the life of the Incarnate

¹ S. Matth. iii. 14.

GOD a chain of penance binds together in one the Baptism and the Agony, as its first link was riveted in the Circumcision.

Here, then, is laid one ground of union between us and our LORD in our penitential acts. For it is not that His acknowledgment of the sin which He bore, is a substitute for ours; that He must bear the public shame, and we be set wholly free; that He must confess our sin, and we remain hidden. Rather He leads us in this, as in every part of our course. His lowly acknowledgment of sin is the motive, the cause, the inducement, as it is the meritorious offering of our own confessions. We kneel by His side, we speak in His accents, we are partakers of His humiliations, when we confess our sins. We are not saved the shame, the bitterness of confession; we are only the more moved to offer it on the assurance of our acceptance in our union with Him.

There is a Confession of sin in secret before the FATHER, "which seeth in secret," and there is a Confession in the ear and before the eye of man, as the representative of the unseen God. The one is the simple exercise of the power of access to the throne of grace, which is the blessed privilege of the Spirit of adoption in every true child of God. The other is the same filial claim clothed with the securities of the outward ordinance given to be the channel and pledge of a special absolving grace. Special confession to God may be made in the presence of the congregation, or before one acting in its name and invested with the sanctities of a Divine commission. The latter, as it is historically a true outgrowth of the former, so is it a perpetuation of the same Divine law.

Our LORD's acknowledgment of sin was public,

and by the power of His sympathy and love He wins the penitent to a like act of self-abasement. And our shame, thus accepted on earth, may through His grace save us from the misery of the exposure of our soul's secret guilt before the assembled world. The Scriptures assure us, that even now in our earthly course we may anticipate the terror of the Judgment Day. "If," as S. Paul declares, "we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."¹ We may escape the anguish of that final exposure by the present endurance of the humiliation of acknowledged sin. S. Bernard says, 'I would, though a sinner, present myself before the tremendous Judge, but as one already judged, in whom He may find nothing more to be judged, because Himself assures me that He will not judge a second time what has been judged already.'

But if the judgment of our soul in this world is to forestall that last Judgment, how much need is there of the searching strictness of an unsparing sentence, such as may indeed represent the scrutiny of the heart-searching, all-holy God! If the one judgment is to be the anticipative equivalent of the other, must not also the one judge be as severely true as the other? Must not the conscience, as it is clothed with the authority of God, exercise also the firm justice and unsparingness of the truth of God? We may surely hope for safety in that most awful searching of the secrets of all hearts before the Face of God, but only if we have sought honestly, if we have welcomed earnestly, here in this life, a sifting as sternly austere, as rigidly uncompromising. How otherwise can we plead His promise?

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.

How venture to anticipate a release in the records of that last Judgment, if the present judgment of ourselves has been partial? If we flatter ourselves, and dissimulate with our own hearts; if we qualify our sins by self-pleasing explanations, softening one, disguising another, giving to a third the appearance of a right intention, humouring a fourth, covering others under the plea of necessity; if, when doubts arise, we decide always in our own favour; when in perplexity, pass easily over our faults, or judge precipitately,—or if again we shrink from blame, are sensitive as to suggestions, deaf to remonstrances, sore at mistrust, indignant at suspicion, blind to hints and insinuations, keen to see the mote in another's eye, slow to see the beam in our own, attributing our faults to circumstance, or misfortune, or temperament, or outward hindrances, or to others' faults or defects,—or again, if we are ever promising and resolving, never enduring the sharp wound of mortification and self-denial;—if such be the tenour of our confessions, then they correspond not with the future Judgment of God ever hastening towards us; we differ from God, we weigh by diverse measures, and rule by different lines, “and divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike an abomination to the LORD.”¹

It is because of our great liability to dishonesty, whether direct or indirect, about ourselves, and the natural incapacity of the soul to see and judge itself aright, that our own Hooker so touchingly urges the benefit of confession to a priest. “Because,” he says in a well-known passage, “the knowledge how to handle our souls is no vulgar and common art; but we either carry towards ourselves for the most part an

¹ Prov. xx. 10.

oversoft and gentle hand, fearful of touching too near the quick, or else endeavouring not to be partial we fall into endless scrupulosities, and sometimes into those extreme discomforts of mind, from which we hardly do ever lift our heads again, men thought it the safest way to disclose their secret faults and to crave imposition of penance from those to whom our LORD JESUS CHRIST hath left in the Church to be spiritual and ghostly physicians, the guides and pastors of redeemed souls, whose office doth not only consist in general persuasion unto amendment of life; but also to the private particular case of diseased minds.”¹

It is a most merciful dispensation of Divine love, one, we can scarce doubt, flowing from the Incarnation of God, and the law which has determined the transmission of all grace through the ministries of a Manhood hypostatically One with Deity, that his brethren in the flesh, men of like passions and infirmities with himself, are set to be the hearers and judges of the records of the sinner’s conscience, even as they are ordained to be the conveyers of the promised blessing of Divine forgiveness. As the Manhood of CHRIST is the treasure-store of all saving grace to redeemed man, —God being reconciled to us through His Incarnation, the FATHER having “given all things”² into the hands of His SON, and having “given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man,”³—so likewise, because His unseen Presence and operations need a visible instrumentality, a seal and sign of His atoning Love, He has constituted men to be to their fellow-men the representatives of His attribute of judgment, the absolvers from the guilt of

¹ Eccl. Pol. l. vi. iv. 7.

² S. John xiii. 3.

³ S. John v. 27.

sin. They who, through a common nature and covenanted grace, are at once kindred with Himself Who sends them, and with those to whom they are sent in His Name, are chosen, because of these special grounds of sympathy, to be the channels of the grace of His eternal Priesthood.

It has been observed in a former lecture, that there is a progress in the conviction of sin, the searching of the conscience gradually becoming more spiritual, more inward, more pervading. Even so in the ministry of Confession there has been a progress of a precisely similar kind. There was among the Israelites, from the beginning, a ministry of priestly confession for particular faults. But it was mainly, if not wholly, confined to outward acts and breaches of positive law. Even in the early Church the ministry of penance touched rather the more grievous sins, which caused scandal under the stricter discipline of those simple times. Only gradually did the law of Confession penetrate beyond the requirements of outward discipline into the secret disorders and needs of the inner life, where no discipline could reach; and as the private prevailed over the public ministry of Confession, and the growing illuminations of the Spirit were diffused, and formed into authoritative rules through the accumulating teaching of the Saints and the spiritual experience of ages,—so the ministry of penitence, following the growth of penitence itself, gradually embraced all inner phases of life, all springs of thought or impulse, all shades of character, all degrees, to use an intelligible but technical expression, of “venial” equally as of “deadly” sin.

There are in confessing sin to a fellow-creature

benefits which can hardly attach to confession made simply to God. One of its benefits is its humiliation. There may be in confession to God alone as much contrition, as profound a sorrow, as ardent a love, as intense remorse, as resolved a purpose of amendment, but there cannot be the humiliation in confession to God, which there is in acknowledging the sin openly, undisguisedly before the visible and conscious gaze of a fellow-creature. The idea of humility can scarcely apply to the secret acknowledgment of sin before the veiled Face of the Eternal. As there was not the awakening of shame in committing the sin before His unseen Presence, such as there would have been in committing it before the eyes of a fellow-creature, so neither is there an awakening of the sense of shame in acknowledging it before Him alone, which there is in acknowledging it before a fellow-creature. To tell out all that we have done, and have been, not alone by oneself, but before another, as this can only be the fruit of a willingness to be humbled, so it is the sure means of deepening humility. This wholesome shame, which is the pain of Confession, and therefore often the deterring hindrance to its exercise, is of its essence, and is a benefit peculiar to itself. And how great a benefit is this,—to heal pride, which is the root of sin; to cherish humility, to which all grace is promised; to have the joy of being united with our LORD in His lowliest acts; to bear shame on earth though it be before one eye only, rather than the shame in other worlds before “the ten thousand times ten thousand!”

Again, if to have our sin before us be, as the text indicates, a vital part of true penitence, does not Confession involve a benefit of special moment in this respect also? For it is a law of nature, that a thought

shaped in words has a palpable being which of itself it has not. Words are the substantial forms in which the floating ideas of the mind embody themselves, and thus can be grasped. Often ideas cannot be realized at all, till they have taken the shape and form of the outward words. The word is not only the expression of the thought: it is its own exponent to itself, its realization, its true means of clearing and defining what otherwise is vague and undetermined. The spoken word has a presence and a life, before which the spirit trembles, when the mere bodiless idea may have lain dormant or dwelt unimpressively on the mind, because unexpressed. Often we cannot bear to hear the actual name of the deed we have done, of the injury we have committed, of the impurity we have indulged. Our sin is before us, as it was not before, when we have given, or, more galling still, another has given it its true, unsoftened name; when the hitherto secret evil of the heart has, under the guidance of a faithful searcher of the conscience, been plainly spoken out. The spoken word does not pass away into the void air. It rises up before the mind's eye as a living power; it has suddenly acquired a substance and a condemning witness, and, like the hand-writing on the wall, it scares the convicted and condemned soul without the possibility of escape.

The subject has led me to speak of the moral, as distinct from the sacramental, benefits of Confession, of its aid in the deepening of penitence, rather than of its value in procuring forgiveness; and the same line of thought leads to a warning, lest Confession itself should need repentance. For nothing is more fatal than the possible self-deceiving of the devout. When

religion itself becomes the ground-work of a deceit, who is to unmask the deceiver? If the very truth becomes a lie, with what salt can the salt itself be salted? There may be a glorying in the very humiliation of a confession, and so shame itself feed a new form of pride. There may be a feeling of rest that the sin is over, because it is acknowledged, and so the unwatchful soul fall a ready prey to the already returning temptation. There may be the mere soothing of a troubled conscience sought, and that alone gained. Such flaws may mar the benefits even of a true confession; how much greater the evil and the loss attached to one untrue, or careless!

But a specially solemn caution and warning is needed, when the use of Confession becomes frequent. What is often repeated, from the very instinct of our nature, loses its freshness, and jeopardds its carefulness. There is, moreover, a momentous difference ordinarily between a first confession, and a habit of confession. A first confession has more prominently for its object the relief of a burdened conscience. Consolation, hope, the way of return to God, are then the chief ideas pressing on the soul. But it would be an evil sign, if these were likewise the absorbing ideas in repeated confessions. Progress in the renewed life, a deepened insight into sin with a view of winning greater victories, increased clearness of vision through increased cleansing in order to rise higher in the spiritual life,—such aims will then assert a growing claim, although the soul still longs for relief from yet clinging faultiness, and rest, it may be, from yet tormenting fear. Habitual confession, to be true and healthful, combines the mingled aims of the renewal of atoning love, and the increase of the Spirit's power. It is a spring of on-

ward advance, as it is a clearing off of lingering hindrances; the gaining a new step in the ever-progressive growth of the soul unto the full measure of the stature of CHRIST, as it is the ever-renewed sealing of peace. There is required as the criterion of a faithful confession, in one habitually confessing, far more than in one first pouring out the pent-up sins of an unsifted life. We need in such a case the marks of a real steadfast tendency to increasing consistency of spiritual progress.

But a sure relief follows the acknowledgment of sin, under whatever form Confession be made. Be it with God alone, no ear but His to hear, or be it clothed in sacramental mysteries, if only the heart be more and more prone to confess its guilt, to bring out each fresh sin, tremblingly alive to the least, faintest presence of sin, and with increased zeal and godly sorrow laying its burden beneath the Cross,—there is surely gained in such penitential acts the most precious assurance of love blotting out transgression, filling the soul with heavenly consolation, burying the acknowledged guiltiness of the fallen in profounder depths than the depths of the sea. There is the answer of peace ever ready, the response of a merciful acceptance breathing in a Countenance which, in answer to the appeal of faith, shines out again and again, in ever-renewed love.

How free and full is the promise assured to Israel! “O Israel, return unto the LORD thy GOD, for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity; Take with you words and turn to the LORD, say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us, neither will we ride upon

horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods ; for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." And again ; " I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely ; for Mine anger is turned away from them."¹ Far deeper and more complete in their redeeming love and creative power are the words, uttered in answer to a similar appeal, under the new and more perfect covenant, by the lips of the Incarnate God ; " Thy sins be forgiven thee ; go in peace," " Thy faith hath made thee whole." More full and certain the assurance, embracing in its result all eternity, must be the witness of Him to Whom all judgment is given both in this world and in the world to come ; " Neither do I condemn thee,"—if only the solemn warning, which accompanied the assurance, be kept ; " Go, and sin no more."

How unspeakable is the mercy, that whenever we turn to Him, even at our will, however great our sin may have been, though we have nothing of our own to offer, " nothing to pay," yet if only we confess what we have been, in the longing to become what He alone can make us, the heart of God is at once touched, and the springs of forgiveness and peace are opened. How great the love we owe to Him through Whose sufferings this grace has been obtained ! How endless the praise due unto Him, Who " according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away :"² to Whom, with the Same JESUS CHRIST, and God the HOLY GHOST, be all glory and praise for evermore. Amen.

¹ Hosea xiv. 1—4.

² 1 S. Pet. i. 3, 4.



LECTURE V.

SATISFACTION.

Ps. LI. 16, 17.

“THOU DESIREST NO SACRIFICE, ELSE WOULD I GIVE IT THEE,
BUT THOU DELIGHTEST NOT IN BURNT OFFERINGS. THE SA-
CRIFICE OF GOD IS A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND A CON-
TRITE HEART, O GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE.”

WE have seen how penitence leads, by a natural impulse, to the acknowledgment of sin, and that out of this principle Confession grows; and how, as Confession becomes more and more clear, more full and searching, life grows; and, further, how growing life makes Confession an instrument of progress, a means of advance to higher holiness, as, on the other hand, increasing holiness leads to a more strict scrutiny of the conscience, which thus, through the grace of God, becomes increasingly tender.

It has also been implied, that amendment of life, the new creation of God, grows with growing penitence, as penitence grows with advancing life, the two mutually acting and reacting on each other. It is as when a storm is passing, the lingering darkness appears all the darker in the breaking out of the sunlight; and the

darker it seems, the more intense is the joy with which we turn our eyes to the returning light.

But neither consciousness of sin, nor the amendment of life, though they continue ever increasing, exhaust the full ardour of a true penitence. The most perfect expression of the working of a true penitence is to be seen in the fifty-first Psalm. Written under a high degree of inspiration, co-operating with a deep personal contrition, and sealed by the Church's perpetual use as a Divine utterance of the truest penitence, applicable, moreover, equally to its most advanced as to its earliest stages, this Psalm brings out, with singular beauty and power, one other and further working of penitential grace.

The Psalm first expresses the inward impulse to confession; "I will acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me." Next, it gives utterance to the longing for a new life; "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Then, towards the close of the Psalm, there is added the desire to offer sacrifice. This forms the special subject suggested by the text.

The words imply the idea of the hecatombs of the Temple ritual, the sin offerings and burnt offerings of sweet savour, which the Law had ordained as the expression of faith in the true Lamb of God about to be sacrificed, to make the only adequate satisfaction for the sin of the world, which at the same time were the means of the worshipper's offering himself and his substance in the desire to please God, as some recompense of the sin which had grieved and insulted Him.

But the Gospel had reached David's heart, and the worthlessness of mere animal sacrifices had been revealed to him. Therefore he adds, "Thou desirest no

(such) sacrifice, else would I give it Thee. But Thou delightest not in burnt offerings” of the mere typical ceremonial Law. The Spirit had, moreover, revealed to David the hidden truth, the inner meaning of those typical sacrifices, even the true “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.” He saw the self-surrendered will of perfect Love, enduring meekly the sufferings of a true Atonement, One greater than man, though in man’s nature, offering Himself in reparation for the sins which He bore for us; and in this revelation he read his own lesson,—how, in order to make his own penitence perfect, he must offer up himself in union with this atoning Victim in the same spirit of self-sacrifice. This conviction he expresses in the words that immediately follow. ‘Thou desirest,’ thus he communes with God, ‘not merely a new life, not merely a new heart and a right spirit. Thou wouldest some reparation, some amends for the past in the sacrifice of the future. Thou wouldest not merely that I should serve Thee henceforth with a pure, blameless integrity. Thou wouldest also that I should restore for wrong done. Thou wouldest that grateful love should give Thee what will please Thee, as before I did what displeased Thee, doing what myself willed.’ But this offering could not be accomplished in the forms of the ceremonial Law. Not with “thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil,”¹ can a true and living reparation acceptable to God be offered by redeemed man; but in the sacrifice of himself. “Thou delightest not in burnt offerings;” but out of “a broken spirit,” out of “a broken and contrite heart,” sacrifice may arise, which “Thou, O God, wilt not despise.”

¹ Micah vi. 7.

There is an instinct in our nature which darkly shadows out this truth. What is the cause of those amazing self-inflicted tortures, by which the poor Indian devotee labours unceasingly in his gloomy and horrid rites, to break through the slough of his flesh, that he may find access to God? What led in early days the nations of Canaan, in their strong agonies of fear, and dark yearnings after reconciliation with an offended God, to offer up even human life, to "give the firstborn for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul?"¹. The instinct which dictated such acts was true. It was the intense conviction that for sin, and the injury which sin works, the sinner needs to make reparation, giving back to the offended Person some offering to be, if possible, adequate to the wrong done, the injury inflicted. Even when sin is forgiven, this yearning remains as an impulse of gratitude, to show, by some strong act of self-abhorrence, hatred of the evil committed, and joy in the mercy bestowed; to give to the offended Person something He may love, to compensate for the evil which He hated; and this even at the cost of life.

This principle, which the instinctive impulse of nature dictates, the HOLY SPIRIT inspires as a law of the supernatural life in the true penitent. This is what the old Fathers called satisfaction, or what the simple language of nature means by making amends. It is more than an improved life, more than the renewal of lost grace. It is the directing the energies of that newly converted nature into acts of continual self-abandonment, in the ceaseless desire to please where offence had been given. Amendment is an absolute duty, without which there can be no salvation. Satis-

¹ Micah vi. 7.

faction is the working of love, without which there can be no real fervour, no true gratitude. The one is the improvement of self, the other is the offering up of the improved self to God. And as penitence grows, the life of the penitent becomes more and more this living sacrifice; and as life advances, and the range and materials of the powers of such self-sacrifice develop and expand, so nobler, more generous ideas are increasingly formed within his soul.

We noted in the preceding Lecture the union which exists between our LORD and the penitent in the acknowledgment of sin. His self-abasement in taking on Himself the sinner's mark in the Circumcision; His coming forth from the crowd gathered around the Baptist, "confessing their sins," as though Himself a sinner and needing repentance, because the baptism implied sins to be repented of and remitted; and again, in a yet far more amazing and self-afflicting humiliation, His Agony, the reception within His soul of the full weight and conscious bitterness of the sins of all mankind, as though they were His own,—these acts were explained to be the mysterious and awful points of contact between our LORD and every broken heart, every contrite soul, who, in the full acknowledgment of its guilt, abases itself under the accepted burden, laying all its grief before God, and accepting its appointed penance in speechless self-condemnation.

Another ground of union exists between our LORD and the penitent in the life of sacrifice, which is the proper fruit of a true penitence. The Sacrifice of the Cross followed the Agony; so does the sacrifice of the contrite spirit follow its acknowledgment of guilt.

In His Atoning Sacrifice our LORD offered what He

alone could offer, the perfect reparation for the sin of man, the restoration to God of what fallen man had denied Him, the utterance of love and devotion, well pleasing to God, covering and blotting out the transgressions which had grieved Him. It was not only the acceptableness of His own Infinite Person, uniting with the Godhead the perfect Humanity, but that in our nature He offered to the FATHER what He loved and desired, in the stead of what had turned away His Face from man,—the alienation wherewith perfect Holiness must ever regard sin. He gave what the creature alone could not give; what was perfectly satisfying to the Divine Nature, because one with God and satisfying precisely where man had signally offended.

The Atoning Sacrifice took the exact form of compensation for human sin. Man had offended God by raising himself to be equal with God. “Ye shall be as gods,”¹ was the temptation; and pride arose, which could bear no equal. Our LORD, equal with God, and very God, yet “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself,”² became the lowest among men, the “very scorn of men, and an outcast of the people;” yea, even less than men—became “a worm, and no man.”³ How complete a compensation! The creature would be God, and God became lowest of the creatures.

Again, man had cast off the yoke of obedience, and our LORD, all supreme in Himself, coequal in majesty and power with the FATHER, reduced Himself to a life of perpetual obedience,—obedience not only to God, but to man, and not only to men, but to criminals, to the most vicious, even to the very lowest of the people,

¹ Gen. iii. 5.

² Phil. ii. 7, 8.

³ Ps. xxii. 6.

even to oppression and cruelty and scorn, and in His infinite submission He became "obedient unto" all the consequences of sin, "even the death of the Cross."¹ How complete the compensation! The creature would endure no LORD, himself be his only master; and God expiated his rebellion by the scourge upon His back, and the blow upon His cheek, by not hiding "His Face from shame and spitting."²

Again, man had sinned by the indulgence of the flesh. Forbidden pleasure was his snare, and his fall, the degrading cause of his uncleanness in the eyes of the All-holy God. And our LORD came as a "Man of sorrows," as a Victim bound to penance, His knees weak through fasting, and His flesh dried up like a potsherd;—"a Lamb for the slaughter," "His tongue cleaving to the roof of His mouth" in the thirst of death. How complete the compensation of endurance for our compliance with the cravings of the flesh!

In these successive scenes of humiliation and pain it was not the suffering, nor the blood, nor the death, which was well pleasing to the FATHER. The agony of the writhing Limb, and the breaking of the sacred Heart, were not the acceptable objects on which the FATHER'S Eye delighted to dwell. It was the offering of the wholly surrendered will, the intense fervour of love, exhausting itself in the sacrifice of all that was most dear, of its own life, of its very self, at any cost, because it would have nothing of its own, and all should be God's, nature yielding its all to its Creator. The inner spirit pervading alike the toil of the ministry, the patience of the conflict, the anguish of the passion, and the shame, the wounding, the desolation of the cross,—this rose up with sweet

¹ Phil. ii. 8.

² Isa. l. 6.

savour from the altar on which the Lamb of God lay before the eyes of God. God was satisfied, because more than all which had been withdrawn and denied Him, was restored to Him. His own work, renewed and perfected in His Only-begotten Son, was become a consecrated oblation for the one end of glorifying Him.

Our LORD speaks of His own Offering in terms wonderfully resembling the words of the text, thus marking the sameness of His own deep purpose with that which breathes within the soul of the penitent yearning to repair the wrong which sin has done. The utterance inspires another psalm which speaks in the Person of CHRIST, S. Paul sealing by his authority its application to Him,—“When He cometh into the world, He saith ; Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body Thou hast prepared Me. In burnt offerings, and sacrifice for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.”¹ Because offerings external to man’s own self were no adequate compensation for man’s transgression, He offered Himself in man’s own nature in the oblation of a perfect obedience.

Our LORD alone could repair the wrong which sin had caused. His meritorious satisfaction was the only true and acceptable propitiation ; the infinitely precious Oblation of the Person of the God-Man alone possessing the power of obliterating the consequences of our guilt, and making amends for its offence. But the Passion of CHRIST was not the substitute for our sacrifices, any more than His acknowledgment of sin was a substitute for ours. The penitent psalmist applies

¹ Heb. x. 5—7 ; Ps. xl. 8—10.

to himself the same ideas of sacrifice and offering which he applies to our LORD. In all the stages of our LORD's life His own elect are to be associated, yea, even identified with Him. The likeness is to be fulfilled, as in other features of His character, so likewise in this spirit of sacrifice, seeking to satisfy for wrong done out of the fervours of a contrite spirit. His atoning sufferings do not supersede such satisfaction of ours. They make ours acceptable, transform, sanctify, not dispense, them.

This truth is implied in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in immediate connection with the text just quoted, as applicable to our LORD alone. "By the which will," says the Apostle, the will which dictated His perfect Sacrifice, "we are sanctified, through the offering of the Body of JESUS CHRIST once for all,"¹—sanctified we are in ourselves, not He alone in us; our offerings not superseded, but united with His offerings; our efforts not bid to cease, nor rendered void or needless, but transformed into His own acceptableness. The union between our LORD and the true penitent is sealed in this community of sacrifice, through grace derived from the Obedience of His own Person. The form of sacrifice may vary. The mode of trial, the character of the endurance, the special aspect of the penitential life, will necessarily have its own individual peculiarity, but the spirit is one; even as life is one in the whole race. Life takes infinitely varied shapes of form and feature and individual character. Even so the "broken spirit," the "broken and contrite heart," varying manifoldly in modes of expression, is yet in essence one; and as life deepens and grows, so the fervour and depth of the

¹ Heb. x. 10.

spirit of self-sacrifice grows also. And as the view of God's glory and of His will expands, and means of service and opportunities of love increase, so the developing fervours of penitential sacrifice find an ever enlarged scope in the fulfilment of its designs of reparation for the errors and sinfulness of the past.

Holy Scripture itself notes certain different modes under which, as principles of action, the infinitely varied sacrifices of the contrite spirit may be classed.

There are mainly four such heads. (1.) The acceptance of the punishment which God imposes upon sin, is one such mode. We cannot always trace the fitness of the visitations of God's providential judgments in this world; nor say of this or this event, that it is the ordained punishment of this or this particular sin. We have indeed a direct warning in the case of "the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices," and of "those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them,"¹ against such personal applications. We know that such calamities may come even as special marks of love to perfect the faithful by chastening. "Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."² But still the universal heart of mankind retains the consciousness, that judgments fall in this world, as direct visitations because of particular sins; and manifold are the instances which the Scriptures record of such retributive interposition in the dealings of God with His people.

We have in the very case of the penitent Psalmist a special instance, connecting together the judicial punishment of God, and the sacrifice of the contrite

¹ S. Luke xiii.

² Heb. xii. 6.

spirit accepting its punishment. Nathan was sent to announce to David the just retribution of God, to be visited in this life on his sin. "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."¹ He fled, when the sword fell, wielded by the hand of his own favourite son. And in what spirit did the penitent bear the stroke? Was it in the self-sacrificing spirit of "a broken and contrite heart," which his words professed? A very striking incident marked the spirit in which David bowed himself beneath the chastisement of God, accepting all its aggravations, the bitterness of which must have sunk, as iron, into his soul. It was not fear that swayed the heart of the fugitive king. It was in no craven spirit that he fled from Jerusalem, as Absalom took possession of it, to meet his destiny of shame and sorrow. Contrition offering itself up with a perfect will to the whole weight of the storm of the wrath of God, is written deeply on the scene which the Spirit has portrayed. "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot, and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."² Then it follows; "And when King David came to Bahurim, behold there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came forth, and cursed still as he came, and he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of King David: and all the people, and all the mighty men were on his right hand, and on his left."³ These

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 10.² 2 Sam. xv. 30.³ 2 Sam. xvi. 5, 6.

men would have slain Shimei on the spot. But David restrained them, and his motive marks how the spirit of sacrifice had penetrated his soul. "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD hath bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day."¹

(2.) Another form of the principle of self-sacrifice is seen in S. Mary Magdalene. Her life after the crisis of her forgiveness was spent in the unceasing devotion to her Deliverer of all that she had once abused in the indulgence of the flesh. All was thenceforth consecrated to the one aim of ministering to Him, and was accepted as her reparation for the past. Beauty, intense passionate affections, wealth, had become sacred offerings to Him. With her rich flowing hair, her earnest form, and rapturous enthusiasm, she stands prominently out on the page of the Gospel. All had been perverted in early days. Impure loves, false pleasures, had formed the idol before which she had sacrificed. The picture was reversed as the spirit of contrition penetrated her soul. It is a remarkable and significant circumstance, that S. Mary Magdalene is the only one described in the Gospel approaching CHRIST with the sole object of obtaining the remission of her sins. Others came in disease, in temporal affliction, in the desire of sharing His kingdom. They came for personal relief, or the promise of future glory, and they gained the superadded, unexpected boon of the forgiveness of their sin. The Magdalene kneels at His feet, conscious only of the one burden of sin, and craving alone for mercy. And what is her return, when forgiven? What is the reparation to Him

¹ 2 Sam. xvi. 12.

Whose grace had healed her? Her passionate love is now all His,—“she loved much.”¹ Her treasured precious ointment is for His head. Her gushing tears are bedewing His feet. Her flowing hair is wiping them. She follows Him from Galilee, ministering to Him of her substance. Her one great sorrow is to have lost Him. Her only rest is in His tomb. Hers was the self-consecration of all, her person, her gifts, her treasures, to repair, as she was able, the self-deseccation of her youth.

(3.) A third mode of expressing this self-sacrificing spirit of a contrite heart, is to be found in the various acts which penitence suggests for the relief of its own fervours, or the punishment of the offending member, to mark the soul's abhorrence of its former shame. Such was S. Peter's going forth to his bitter weeping at the dead of night, the first penitential act of the new covenant, the first in the long line of expressions of that “sorrowing after a godly sort,” which arose through the grace purchased by the Passion, of which S. Paul enumerates the chief characteristic features. “What carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge.”² All forms of self-mortification, prolonged hours of prayer, special designs and vows, lavish alms, untiring labours, mark the course along which the spirit of penitence has developed its energies of self-afflicting love, longing to prove its truth and its steadfastness to Him Who fills the souls of His redeemed unto fulness of hope and power in the consciousness of His unspeakable mercy; “Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace.”

¹ S. Luke vii. 47.

² 2 Cor. vii. 11.

(4.) Once more ; there is a fourth mode of sacrifice, which is of all the most constant, the most necessary, the most surely pressing on each and every child of our race, and which is of all forms of discipline the most palpably ordained of God. The outward trials of our common lot have come to be so much the ordinary tenour of every man's life, that they have almost ceased to wear a penal character. Trying changes of health, of natural spirits, of temperature ; the shattered nerve, or gloomy sky ; the failing strength, or sickly weariness ; the countless ceaseless hindrances, difficulties, disappointments, bereavements, of our earthly lot ; the uncongenial tempers, the manifold infirmities of others ; the vexing irritating demands of the passing hour,—how few persons habitually, perhaps even at all, look on these details, succeeding each other so rapidly, as directly ordained penances for sin, ever multiplying, the simple and real unfolding into its infinite necessary consequences of the one primeval sentence : “Cursed is the ground for thy sake. In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground.”¹ Could we but retain, in each and all of the trying circumstances of hourly life, the same spirit in which one confessing with true contrition, asks for a penance, we should be preserving the only intelligible attitude of a sinner working out his own salvation under the conditions of a fallen world still fulfilling its awful doom. Could we but know the hope full of immortality, and still also cherish the broken and contrite heart which offers itself uncomplainingly in every untoward change of outward things, in every

¹ Gen. iii. 17—19.

cross accident, in every infirmity of another or one's own, as a fresh opportunity in which love can consummate its sacrifice, and an already surrendered will perfect its fixed resolve to do all to make amends for the evil wherewith before we had wearied God,—ours would be the sacrifice which God will not despise. The spirit of self-sacrifice finds constant food to feed the flame of its undying fervours, in the casualties of the daily routine of life, and the susceptibilities of the momentarily variable feelings.

These four distinct laws of satisfaction may combine, or run into each other in infinite interchanges; or one alone may form the normal and more permanent state. Through such means true penitence seeks continually to offer some compensation for the evils of the past, and as it learns this spirit of self-sacrifice, it rises in purity, and even becomes identified with the life of the Saint. There is no limit to the possible advancement of the penitent soul, whatever its past sin may have been—its attainment of virtue even rivalling the state of those who have never forfeited the full grace of their regeneration. The first may be last, and the last first. This, which is true of all forms of grace, is pre-eminently true of the spirit of sacrifice. The sense of forgiven sin, of much being forgiven, the remembrance of the love which has shone out upon the soul, as the darkness of sin passed, the overflowing peace of absolving grace, the removal of tormenting fear, of even the memory of the guilt, of the very recollection of the infirmity, and the new powers developed, superhuman strength capable of maintaining itself above the weakness which had filled the soul with shame and anguish,—such feelings form a

stimulus to the constant effort of a surrendered will, and an unsparing self-devotion. It may happen that the penitent outstrips many who had never known the measure of his unfaithfulness, even as the last Apostle "laboured more abundantly than they all." But what if to sanctity itself be superadded the perfection of penitence? What if one who by comparison has sinned the least, yet seeing his lesser sins with a keener and profounder shame, and feeling God's forbearance towards him with a more lively and ardent gratitude, and ever remembering with a vivid steadfast consciousness what Divine forgiving love has been, and is, repents more truly, and offers up richer fruits of a more tender contrition,—what may not be the result of such a combination of powers of continual progress? To what height may not a soul attain, in which an ever growing sanctity and an ever deepening penitence coalesce?

Let us ever bear in mind that in the Divine counsels there is intended to be "a filling up of that which is behind of the afflictions of CHRIST, for His Body's sake, the Church;"¹ and to be united with the spirit of His sacrificial life is one evident expression of this law. We can never look to offer up to our God of "that which doth cost us nothing." To live within the sphere of His spirit of sacrifice, of that which is indeed the very essence of His life, is one unchangeable condition of the hope of rising into God, of being in God, of ascending in the scale of life, of fulfilling our vocation, as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service."

There are special self-denials and toils and ministries of love, unsparing acts of self-devotion, it may be lifelong, which are to many the rejoicing exercise of

¹ Coloss. i. 24.

powers kindled by God for His glory, but not the portion of all, even though they be true penitents. Yet a like spirit may animate quiet ordinary ways of an unnoticed unobtrusive faithfulness in every-day duties in any sphere of life. To labour to do good where we have done evil ; to make peace where we have marred it ; to cause joy where we have caused sorrow ; to heal wounds, and repair wrong ; to impart life, where we may have spread the infection of death ; to promote the glory of God where He has been dishonoured ; to extend the blessings of the love of CHRIST, and win hearts to Him, where His claims have been disregarded, His yearning love disappointed ; to seek, through trial and effort, and the abandonment of one's own wishes, interest, and ease, thus to spend and be spent—these are elements of the meet and acceptable sacrifice, open alike to every redeemed man, which, united with the merits of the Passion of the SON of God, will surely be remembered in that Day, when “whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward ;”¹ when it will be said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”²

¹ S. Matth. x. 42.

² S. Matth. xxv. 40.



LECTURE VI.

AMENDMENT OF LIFE.

S. LUKE XV. 18.

“I WILL ARISE, AND GO TO MY FATHER.”

It has been shown in the course of the foregoing lectures, (1.) that penitence, though continually varying in its sensations, and outward expressions, must necessarily be life-long, its last utterance heard at the foot of the Eternal Throne, as the Voice of the Great Absolver pronounces before the assembled world the final acceptance of the elect soul ; (2.) that the forgiving love of JESUS is the constant stimulus of an ever deepening contrition, and the reproving manifestations of the Spirit the quickening power of a gradually perfecting conversion ; (3.) that the true tendency of the burdened spirit, both for its relief and its cleansing, is to acknowledge its dreaded secrets, that they may never more rise up against the soul to condemn it, that confessing what we once were, we may become what we were not ; and (4.) that the penitent thus renewed seeks more and more ardently to offer up as a living sacrifice to God all of life or power that remains, to be some practical compensation for wasted gifts, and grace abused, wrecks strewn along the shore of the now hated past.

It has been, moreover, implied, that the amendment of life is an essential condition of every true conversion. But of this branch of the subject more needs to be said; for the practical transformation of the renewed nature must evidently be the most vitally substantial effect and criterion of a true penitence.

The two practical conditions of repentance, already fully dwelt upon, confession and satisfaction, equally presuppose amendment of life; for the acknowledgment of sin is but the clearing away of hindrances to attain a peaceful newness of life, and there can be no true self-sacrifice, which is not the expression of a heart more and more conformed to the will of God. Moreover, unless we take into account the solid groundwork of an amended life, there is the greatest possible danger of penitence evaporating in sentiment. Nature imitates grace in nothing more than in such manifestations. There are natural susceptibilities prone to tears, and quickly stirred to devotion; self-reproaches indulged as the mere relief of wounded pride, subtle gratifications of self-consciousness; even as there are sacrifices which cost nothing, implying no effort, bearing no stamp of the Cross, and conversions depending on mere change of outward circumstances, or accidental freedom from the proximate occasions of sin, implying no self-surrender of the dangerous pleasure or weak indulgence. Out of these constituents a delicate phantom-shape of penitence may be cheaply formed, the hollowness of which any real temptation quickly exposes.

On the other hand there may be ungrounded fears as to the truth of penitence, because the sorrow seems no greater than any other sorrow, nay, perhaps even less. Some passing earthly disappointment may have

wrung from the heart a more sensible anguish, than the burden of all one's sins. It may be so without fault, for sentiment is not in our power. The impulses of the heart are nature's instincts. Contrition does not necessarily rise above ordinary sorrows, as a sorrow. In some natures the fountain of tears gushes readily ; in others they never rise to the surface. Sensations vary as the temperament varies. Penitence would be dependent on the animal spirits, if such variations were the test of its power and its truth. But contrition is not to be measured by the sensible tenderness which accompanies it; its only true test is its strength of purpose. Contrition rises above all other sorrow by the determination of the will, by the inward setting of the silent heart in stern preparation to wait upon God ; and its power is seen in the changes taking place in the higher regions of the soul, where great resolves maintain their sway, and self is being subdued through the strong grasp of faith fastening upon God. We do not judge of the movements of the great deep by the roar and splash of the waves which make their wild play upon the shore, but by the long silent roll far out at sea. And so, likewise, the secret current of the steadfast will, not the impulsive fluctuations of the tender sensibilities, is the true evidence of the requickened soul yielding itself to the inspirations of the HOLY SPIRIT, the inworking Presence of God. Thou canst shed no tears over thy grievous sin. Grant it. The eternal Judgment depends not on this variable tenderness of a creature's mould. But wouldest thou undergo all loss, bear all denial, use all effort, rather than knowingly consent to a single sin ? Then be assured ; thou hast passed from death to life, and God has enfolded thee within the powers of the world to come.

What a vast range of progressive life expands within the compass of the few brief words of the text; "I will arise, and go to my father!" The swine, the husks, the far country, the stranger citizen, all have passed from our view, as the penitent Prodigal utters the words, at which as by a magic spell the scene changes into the new creation of God. The words convey two ideas which embrace the full truth of an amended life. Amendment of life has its objective, as well as its subjective reality—what is outwardly apprehended, and what is inwardly attained. The eyes are purged to see, and the will is quickened to grasp what the eyes behold. In S. Paul's conversion there were two distinct operations. The scales dropped off from his eyes, and the strong energies of his resolute will were reversed. Most strikingly does S. Paul express with a singular terseness of language these two great concurrent facts, the objective and subjective changes in the history of his conversion. "I was not disobedient," he says, "to the heavenly vision."¹ The heavenly vision entrancing him, was the objective reality of his renewed life. "I was not disobedient," was the correspondence of the inner man, the subjective reality, which sealed the truth of his acceptance with God. In every true conversion it is ever the same. The change is twofold. The penitent has passed into a new world, and within it he rises "from grace to grace, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD."

Consider, first, how great is the objective change, the new world opened around the penitent, as he arises to go to his father. The vision of his father's home, and its many mansions of light and joy, the many forms

¹ Acts xxvi. 19.

of saints, and angels innumerable, fill the expanse now spread before him, with the ever growing manifestation of the eternal laws of righteousness, of truth, of purity, of love, the guidings of Providence, the secrets of grace, and the miracles of prayer. Earthly relationships are now transformed in God, having new claims for God, new joys in Him. Fresh sympathies and sweetnesses of a higher fellowship, new duties, new forms of service, spring up unexpectedly everywhere around his path with fresh stimulants to fresh activities. All nature is seen wearing a changed aspect; sweet flowers bloom where all before was barren, lights break through the darkest clouds, the mystery of trial and sorrow and pain, even of death, is unveiled, and all speaks of mercy. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."¹

These new objects are revealed to the soul with the special design of raising it to a higher level, that the penitent may apprehend the purposes and operations of God, and faith thus quickened be enabled to co-operate with the grace now working in him. Such is the ordinary mode of God's dealing with us. His Spirit reveals the truth, raises the soul to apprehend it, then excites the will in the consciousness of renewed powers and elevated views, to unite with the Will of God in a higher order of life. Instances of this law of grace occur in Holy Scripture. Such, e.g., was our LORD's dealing with Martha. She was not, as Mary was, dwelling habitually in the sustained consciousness of a higher Presence, with a faith, therefore, prepared for miracles. She must be raised to this higher level, to enter into the mystery of her brother's resurrection. To produce this effect our

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

LORD speaks to her. "JESUS saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." But this is an insufficient faith, and therefore our LORD continues; "JESUS said unto her, I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this?" This higher view of faith in the present personal Life and life-giving power of the Incarnate God, visibly at work before her eyes, must be awakened and drawn forth from her soul. "Yea, LORD, I believe that Thou art the CHRIST, the SON of GOD, Which should come into the world." Yet still Martha's apprehension of the truth was but weak and fitful; and though for a moment she had caught this higher enthusiasm, she was again sinking back, even at the very crisis of the miracle, and our LORD again pauses at the brink of the tomb to save her from the imminent loss. Even as He said, "Take ye away the stone," she was interposing natural hindrances; "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, LORD, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." She must be raised again to the height of miraculous power. "JESUS saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of GOD?" And our LORD, stirred by the consciousness of the dull spiritual apprehension around Him, to which Martha had given vent, that He might sustain the frailty of nature in the hearts of all gathered by the tomb, continues to speak, even while the stone is being removed. "And JESUS lifted up His eyes, and said, FATHER, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I knew that Thou

hearest Me always, but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."¹

Here, then, is one important law affecting the amendment of life. The penitent needs to be raised by inward illuminations into the consciousness of a new world, so as to correspond with the wonder-work of God. This primary truth is implied in all the practical lessons of Holy Scripture. It is the inner principle of S. Paul's exhortation, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure."² The apprehension in the soul of the quickening power of God is the groundwork of the energy of will to work with Him. As we rise to the level of a living faith in the work of God, we are enabled to work also.

Again, consider the new life awakened within the penitent soul, in correspondence with the heavenly vision. There are three chief stages of the life of God in the soul, from its first dawning to its meridian height of glory. They are known in spiritual theology as the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. How marvellously throughout its wondrous course is the soul's renewed life identified with the life of the Incarnate God! These three stages of spiritual advancement correspond with three distinct mysteries in our Lord's life; for it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren in all things, and He is like them in this, which is essential to a creature's state, the progressive development of the powers of renewed Humanity.

The three mysteries which correspond with our

¹ S. John xi.

² Phil. ii. 12.

three successive stages of advancing life, are His Circumcision, His Baptism, His Ascension. Our LORD's Circumcision exhibited the truth, that the law of purity, of perfect cleansing, was fulfilled in man's nature. His Baptism was the increased endowment of His Humanity with the fullest illumination of the HOLY GHOST. There was yet again a further development of the glory of His Humanity, when He assumed its spiritual, heavenly condition; in which He ascended to His FATHER's side, and in the Flesh was seated at His Right Hand. The powers fulfilled in our renewed life are imperfect, but yet true expressions of these different orders of life thus manifested in the Incarnate GOD, and are the same in kind, however inferior in degree. The changes in Himself are the archetypes of the progressive developments of spiritual life in His Elect.

It is not that one stage of progress ceases, as the other begins; or that you can draw a broad distinctive line between the one and the other; or that when an advanced stage is reached, there is no recurrence to the practice of the one preceding it. Practically they run into each other, and intermingle one with the other; and neither the one nor the other, in this life, is ever perfected. We are at best but imperfect disciples in each stage of amendment; and yet the one is, in its characteristic features, essentially distinct from the other. There is also a progress in the order in which the one succeeds the other, one rising to greater height than another. Thus, necessarily, the purgative way takes the first place. It commences as we first arise to struggle out of sin. The cleansing away of former sins, the striving against evil thoughts, the purifying of unclean affections, the restraining of undisciplined tempers, the mortification of intemperate appetites,

the extinction of ill-will, of jealousies, of selfishness, of covetousness—these are samples of the first earnest works which await the penitent in the earlier part of his course. It is the first stage of his life, in union with the mystery of our LORD'S Circumcision. As these inward strugglings subside, and the renewed spirit, conscious of its own powers, strong in its recovered purity, stretching forward to the things which are before, gives itself to the study of virtue, of the graces in their different kinds, the increase of spiritual knowledge and holiness,—as e.g., obedience to rule, patience under pain, peacefulness under humiliation, thankfulness under trial, largeness of charity, sweetness of forbearance, the balanced discipline of the will, a life of recollection and heavenly-mindedness, are being formed—the illuminative way is reached, in which the mystery of our LORD'S Baptism is being fulfilled.

But yet beyond these developments of virtue and knowledge there rises the further height, when the soul is set to fulfil all its service in unison with God, to bring each thought into obedience to CHRIST, to think as God thinks, to work as God works, to have the same designs, the same ends, to have His glory so constantly before the mind, so to see Him in everything, so to refer everything to Him, and unite the will so closely to His, that life becomes more and more lost in God, one with Him, hidden with CHRIST in Him. It is the mystery of our LORD'S Ascension fulfilled in the union of the life of His elect and His own, as He now liveth with the FATHER, "far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, whether in this world or in that which is to come."

The practical amendment of life needs great definiteness. Definite tests are requisite in order to mea-

sure its reality, and its power. The two following tests are suggested, as being applicable to every form of life. First, it is not enough that a besetting sin be overcome; it is necessary to a true conversion, that the sin be replaced by its opposite virtue. Moses is an instance of this complete change. His early history marks him as naturally a man of a high impetuous temper. His slaying the Egyptian, and then the charge of his Hebrew brother,—“Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?”¹—prove this. But years of solitary musing and adversity in the wilderness, and revelations of God passing before his mind, had worked a transformation of character; and Scripture records of him in later life, that he was “the meekest man in all the earth.”² Not only had the impetuous undisciplined temper been subdued, it had given way to its opposite grace. And yet as a warning to show the strength of the original passion, and the possibility of the return of the long-past evil, unless still watched against, even in a state of grace, his fall, which cost him the bitter loss of the sight of the land of promise, was a relapse into this one sin of earlier days, when, vexed and weary with the provocation of a complaining people, “he spake unadvisedly with his lips.”³ But this was the one only mote upon the otherwise bright shining of his steadfast grace. It is a remarkable fact, that as the leading Prophet of the Old Covenant exhibited this power of transforming grace, as a pattern to those who should come after, so the chief Apostle of the New Covenant exhibited a similar instance, and in his case without any known fall to mar its perfectness. S. Peter was in early life signally marked by heedlessness. Never, perhaps, was there a man more

¹ Exod. ii. 14.² Numb. xii. 3.³ Ps. cvi. 33.

rashly vaunting, or more impulsively self-reliant ; and he fell through these faults. Yet if we may judge of his after-character by the tone and precepts which specially distinguish his writings, no one of the Apostles exhibited more prominently the graces of watchfulness, lowliness, and sobriety. These graces, as a general tone, pervade his Epistles, and are expressed in frequent injunctions.

We may then regard it as a certain test, that in proportion as any marked fault of early life, any one cause of our many falls, becomes not only weakened, but replaced by its opposite,—in proportion as where we were weak, we are becoming strong, where we are, however slowly and inadequately, gaining on the defeated foe by the advancing steps of a triumphant Power from above,—the signs of a true conversion are manifest. The strong one is not only expelled from his fortress, it is being taken possession of by One stronger than he.

The second test, also universally applicable, is the grace of humility. When the natural tendencies of self-assertion and self-glorying, the pride of life, are yielding to the growth of lowliness and simplicity, a true conversion is being worked. It is to be carefully noted, that the tendency to self-aggrandizement, the wish “to be as gods,” was developed within the soul of man—how arising we know not—even before the state of supernatural righteousness, the Paradisaical condition of man’s nature, was lost. Pride was a cause, not a consequence, of the Fall. It is, therefore, specially inherent and rooted in us ; unlike other sins, such as lust and untruthfulness, which have grown out of the first sin, not stirred or at work previously to the Fall. The

present hold which pride has upon our nature is connected with this fact. As it awoke before the first transgression, so it remains underlying all other impulses of evil, stimulating them, as if it were one's very self. On this account it may have been,—because our life, throughout all our race, has this fundamental evil at work within it,—that our LORD came in a state so marked by lowliness and self-sacrifice. It might seem to have been the one end of the manifestation of Himself—that in every aspect of His life He might teach this law, as a perpetual contradiction to man's primary and most characteristic sin. Scripture dwells upon it as though it were the one lesson which His sacrifice of Himself was intended to enforce. “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them, and rose again.”¹ He Himself selects it as the special distinguishing grace which was to be His true characteristic likeness. When He bids us copy Him, it is in this particular form of life; “Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.”² We cannot, therefore, but regard this grace, as an essential, universal test of an amended life. Our life is amended just in proportion as we cease to assert self, to put self forward; as we grow in the attainment of the opposite state, self giving way, silently retiring, more and more being hidden even if possible from oneself; the spirit of unceasing sacrifice, which delights to be in itself nothing, unobservedly offering all that one is, or can do, before the Sacred Presence in Which we ever move, the Beginning and Ending of our life.

But the onward advance of an amended life ceases

¹ 2 Cor. v. 15.

² S. Matth. xi. 29.

not till we have reached even unto the FATHER. To take the full view of amendment of life, our thoughts must rise to the developments of which the boundless capacities of renewed humanity may be hereafter receptive, which can be attained only within the regions of the Infinite and the Eternal. In the possibilities of the ever increasing advancement of the renewed life in other worlds, lies one of our truest encouragements, when we mourn the slowness and imperfections of our progress in this world. Our greatness is not so much in what we here attain, but in what we may attain hereafter. And so our trust for the present is not so much the actual gain, but our tendency towards a future gain. The possible reach of grace is too great to be compassed by any present rule. The measure of the stature of CHRIST is too vast, to suppose that any present attainment can be adequate to the conception realized. All is now "in part." "Now we know in part, and we prophesy in part." Only "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."¹ Even S. Paul says of himself; "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after." "I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD in CHRIST JESUS."² When we would try ourselves, even though it be the latest experience of the departing saint, it is rather as to what we tend to be, than what we are, that we judge ourselves. We judge of the future by the tendencies of the present. The upward growth will be according to the bent of the lower stem. We cannot see God, but

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 9.² Philipp. iii. 12—14.

we can see what tends towards God. The mystical ladder's ascending steps are within our gaze. The Form of the Everlasting, Who standeth above, is shrouded in the inscrutable darkness.

We are at best like tropical plants struggling beneath ungenial skies with stunted growth, which can bear no fruit, nor expand into flower, but which if transplanted into the regions of the sun would develop into richest foliage and abundant produce. The poor deformed races of men who creep along the frozen seas, if removed to the sunny south, rise to a nobler stature and developed powers. This same law nourishes Christian hope, through the belief, that the faint feeble beginnings of this season of struggles and fears, while the corruptible body weigheth down the soul, far off from God, when transferred to more genial skies, shall, if not here, yet there, expand into their predestined fulness, and all whose eyes shall then behold God, shall grow into the perfect likeness of God, in the power of the vision of God. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

We are saved more by hope, than by actual attainment; more by dispositions forming, by tastes cherished, by movements onward, than by conquests completely gained, or ends completely compassed. We measure the knots, and mark the direction of our voyage; we are not at the haven where we would be. We judge by the yearnings still breathing, the efforts still being made, to reach our FATHER's home, not restless or anxious overmuch to know the exact distance still intervening. We judge by the signs that we are still upon our way, rather than the actual sight of our long-sought end. You mourn that you have not attained

¹ 1 S. John iii. 2.

the graces you seek ; you are ashamed to speak of the littleness of your amendment. Be it so. But can you feel assured, that the character which is being formed in you is true to your vocation ; that the increases of grace are growing as surely as the concentric rings which on the trunk of the oak show the annual increase of its bulk ; that the character being formed in you is such as would, in the more congenial atmosphere of your heavenly FATHER's home, surely assume the very form and likeness of CHRIST, even as the risen body shall be "fashioned after His glorious body?" Then surely all is well.

But we must ever bear in mind that we are on our probation. The Scriptures reveal one primary law of the mystery of life, which serves to reconcile many conflicting phenomena of our present state, when it declares that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."¹ The history of Providence is the reconciling together of mercy and truth ; that as now we are partakers of mercy, forbearing us, forgiving us, obliterating the past, renewing the future, so truth will at last fulfil its own demands, and only "he that is righteous shall be righteous still, and he that is holy shall be holy still ;" while "he that is unjust shall be unjust still," and "he that is filthy shall be filthy still."² Though in our FATHER's house there are many mansions, and the SON is gone to prepare a place for us ; yet "not anything can enter there that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie : but only they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."³ The highest joy reserved

¹ Gal. vi. 7.² Rev. xxii. 11.³ Rev. xxi. 27.

for the creature in heaven, the joy of our LORD, is not the joy of those who have never known sin. It has been beautifully said, that the pearls on the gates of Paradise are the tears of penitents.¹ The entrance into the heavenly city is through penitential sorrows turned into eternal joys. And surely the joy of our LORD, the joy over which angels rejoice, is the mingled strain of hearts which, as they are lost in God, still bear the memory of how great has been the forgiveness of how great sins, to whom heaven is all the more precious because of the hell out of which they have been raised, who are penetrated with the consciousness of undeserved compassion, while being filled with rapture at the bliss into which they are translated, in whom the consciousness of forgiving love, and of grace perfected in Divine beauty, melt into one fulness of ecstasy. It is the joy in which the sense of sorrow and fear past enhances the sense of present insured endless beatitude : the joy of rest after toil ; of certain acceptance after long anxieties. It is the joy of the redeemed, who sing the new song, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ;"² of those who "have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb ;" and who therefore are "before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple : and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."³

¹ I am indebted for this thought to Dr. Neale.

² Rev. v. 9.

³ Rev. vii. 14, 15.

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